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THE ROOT NOTE

I write this editorial having recently returned from the London Acoustic Show – and what a weekend it was. Many thanks to all of you who came and, to those that didn't, you missed out! For any lover of acoustic guitars, the show was nothing short of a drool-fest.

This year was the show's fifth year and, having been involved with every one, I can honestly say I think this year's was the finest collection we've ever had. This, of course, was augmented because exhibitors were invited to showcase all manner of stringed (non-orchestral) instruments, including the big three of the 'alternatives': ukuleles, mandolins and banjos.

In conversation with some of you who were at the show, one issue came up more than any other, and that related to the benefits or otherwise of spending serious money on a guitar – and by serious money, we really mean serious, there are plenty of guitars available that'll set you back tens of thousands of pounds, check out the Kostal 00 on page 48 for proof.

One potential buyer asked me if a £4,000 guitar is twice as good as a £2,000 guitar. Of course, it doesn't work like that. But one thing's for sure, investing in the finest instrument your budget will permit is important. On this, I remember Doyle Dykes' wise words when we discussed this issue. I had opportunity to meet with Doyle at the time that I was putting the very first issue of *Acoustic* together. He spoke about the rewards high-end instruments return; that they inspire and enthuse in a way budget instruments can't. Many choose not to spend big on a guitar because they feel their playing skills don't warrant it, or because they worry they won't get sufficient time to play. But that's



the point, argued Doyle. A higher spec'd guitar is going to be more rewarding to play in terms of tone, reliability and stability, thereby making you want to play more. And the more we play, the better we get. It's certainly a message Doyle preaches and that's good enough for me.

The good news is that production techniques are better now than they have ever been. So, whether your budget is major or minor, it's a great time to be in the market for a new acoustic guitar.

Steve

Steve Harvey

Editor





ACOUSTIC Presents...

**15 TRACKS
OF THE MONTH'S
BEST NEW
ACOUSTIC MUSIC**

01



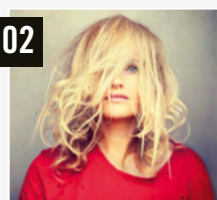
SARAH CLASS NORTHERN SHORE

'Northern Shore' is the debut single from award-winning composer Sarah

Class. After being taken under the wing of George Martin Music, Sarah recorded the majority of her debut album *Unity* with Grammy award-winning producer Jay Newland at Carriage House Studios in Connecticut. Despite her classical training, Sarah only learnt to sing and play guitar in 2007. Sarah said, "It was a huge step for me, but I want to reach out and connect directly as an artist and songwriter in my own right, so I had to do it." *Unity* is released on 2 October on Glorious Technicolour Records.

- www.sarahclass.com
- www.facebook.com/sarahclass
- www.twitter.com/sarahclass

02



LESLEY PIKE BROOKLYN

Having cut her teeth in Toronto, Canadian indie darling Lesley Pike remains a popular

and respected member of the city's vibrant music scene, but has found herself embraced by major cities around the world. Forays to the UK, including invitations as Gibson's featured performer at Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival two years in a row, led to the recording of her new album *November* in London with producer/guitarist James Bryan. Pike has shared the stage with Jason Mraz, Darius Rucker, Jon Allen, the Dunwells, Joan Osborne and many others.

- www.lesleypike.com
- www.facebook.com/lesleypikemusic
- www.twitter.com/lesleypike

06



CHRIS CLEVERLEY THE DAWN BEFORE THE DAY

Whispers have been spreading far and wide around the new British

folk scene about Chris Cleverley and his haunting tales of ghost women, lonesome clock towers, lovelorn mariners and hospital beds. Chris' trademark sound is at times likened to the magnitude of an orchestra only to moments later pull audiences to the edge of their seats. From touring festivals to sharing the bill with heavyweights like Martin Simpson, Chris has created a buzzing anticipation for his forthcoming record, *Apparitions*, released October 2015.

- www.chriscleverley.com
- www.facebook.com/chriscleverleymusic
- www.twitter.com/Chris_Cleverley

07



HUGH CORNWELL CADIZ

Hugh Cornwell is one of the UK's finest songwriting talents and accomplished live performers. The original

guitarist, singer and main songwriter in the British rock band the Stranglers, he has enjoyed massive UK and European success with 10 hit albums and 21 top forty singles, etching himself into the UK and Europe's musical psyche. As a solo artist he has worked with producers including Liam Watson, Tony Visconti and Steve Albini to create eight rapturously received studio albums, culminating in 2015's anthology, *The Fall And Rise Of Hugh Cornwell*.

- www.hughcornwell.com
- www.facebook.com/hughcornwellofficial
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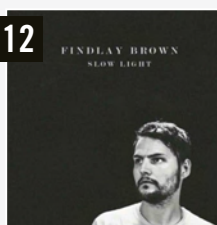
LUKE DANIELS WHAT'S HERE WHAT'S GONE

One of the world's best melodeon players and a critically acclaimed singer-songwriter,

Luke Daniels new 'coin operated' show *Revolve & Rotate* combines his outstanding talents as a songwriter, guitarist and pianist with that of a 120 year old Polyphon machine. Luke's signature style and elegant songwriting has graced stage and studio in the company of The London Philharmonic Orchestra, Ian Anderson (Jethro Tull), Chris Wood, Cara Dillon and as a member of the internationally renowned Riverdance Band.

- www.lukedanielsmusic.com
- www.facebook.com/luke.daniels.980
- www.twitter.com/lukedanielsfolk

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FINDLAY BROWN RUN HOME

Findlay Brown is a Yorkshire born, Brooklyn based singer-songwriter. A modern day troubadour, his

music is melodic, gentle and intimate drawing on influences from the rural settings where he grew up. Findlay's third solo album, *Slow Light* was written and recorded in New York, and follows his widely acclaimed albums, 2007's extraordinary *Separated By The Sea* ("the most unlikely classic of the year" *The Guardian*), and 2010's Bernard Butler produced *Love Will Find You*, which re-cast Brown as a modern day Roy Orbison.

- www.findlaybrown.com
- www.facebook.com/FindlayBrown
- www.twitter.com/findlaybrown

03



CONOR COUGHLAN A THING LIKE THAT

Conor Coughlan is a 19-year-old British singer-songwriter who has spent the last year

touring up and down the United States and Canada. He has opened for artists such as Justin Furstenfeld (of Blue October) and shared a stage with Jackson Browne. In spring 2015 Coughlan signed with the UK label Homewood Music Collective with worldwide distribution via Proper Records. His album *Give It Up* was recorded at t Fantasy Studios in Berkeley, California and was produced by Jeffrey Wood. It's due for release on 9 October 2015.

- www.conorcoughlanmusic.com
- www.twitter.com/conorcoughlan_
- www.facebook.com/conorcoughlanmusic

04



JENN GRANT BOMBSHELL

Jenn Grant is one of Canada's most beloved singer-songwriters. She has charmed audiences

at home and abroad with five celebrated albums of varying styles, which have jumped effortlessly between irresistible pop songs and intimate folk ballads. In the last few years, she has won multiple East Coast Music Awards and, most recently, earned nominations for two 2015 Juno Awards, including songwriter of the year for her new record *Compostela*.

- www.jenngrant.com
- www.facebook.com/JennGrantMusic
- www.twitter.com/jenngrantmusic

05



ALEX SEEL OH THE GLAMOUR

Music has led Alex Seel from Devon to London to Ireland and back to London again. Through

his wanderings, Alex has picked up a songwriting style and finger-picking guitar technique reminiscent of the 70s contemporary folk troubadours. Alex promoted his album, *Shifting Sands*, in 2013 while supporting Graham Parker in Italy, and he continues to share his music around the UK and Ireland. His newest release is an EP entitled *Other Paths*.

- www.alexseel.com
- www.facebook.com/AlexSeel10
- www.twitter.com/alexseelmusic

08



ANGE HARDY WILLIAM FREND

The past 12 months saw Ange Hardy nominated at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, win the FATEA Album

of the Year and receive an array of five-star reviews for her album *The Lament of The Black Sheep*. To follow up on that success she's now written, produced and released a 14-track album entitled *Esteesee*, based on the life and work of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ange Hardy describes herself as "contemporary folk in a traditional style." As well as singing she plays whistle, guitar and harp on her new album alongside 11 other world-class musicians.

- www.angehardy.com
- www.facebook.com/angehardymusic
- www.twitter.com/angehardymusic

09



JACQUELYN HYNES GINI'S TUNE

Jacquelyn Hynes is a multi-instrumentalist and composer. She has supported Ireland's

leading musicians including Martin Hayes, Michael McGoldrick, Mary Coughlan and Lunasa, performed with Donal Lunny and for President Mary Macaleese. She was awarded the Katherine McGillivray "Get A Life Fund" for musicians which facilitated an MA in performance at The Irish World Academy, completed in 2010.

- www.jacquelynhynes.com
- www.twitter.com/jacquelynhynes
- www.facebook.com/pages/Jacquelyn-Hynes-Music/125835500807048

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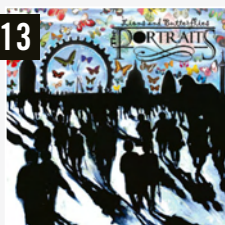
MARTIN BARRE SEA OF VANITY

Grammy Award winner Martin Barre was the guitarist of Jethro Tull for 43 years, whose album sales have

exceeded 60 million. As well as numerous Jethro Tull albums, Martin has worked with many other artists including Paul McCartney, Phil Collins, Gary Moore, Jo Bonamassa and Chris Thompson. He's shared a stage with legends including Hendrix, Fleetwood Mac, Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin. His sixth solo album *Back To Steel* celebrates his 50th anniversary as a guitarist. It's out on 18 September and brings together all his influences including early blues and classic rock.

- www.martinbarre.com
- www.facebook.com/officialmartinbarre

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THE PORTRAITS EXILE

Anglo-Irish alt-folk duo the Portraits, husband and wife Jeremy and Lorraine Millington from Bristol

and Galway respectively, reached the iTunes chart in January with their charity single *The Rest Of Time*, championed by BBC local radio, Radio 2 and 6 Music and featuring the voices of 2,000 people recorded across the UK during 2014 all singing to save lives lost to blood cancers. This year has seen the Portraits playing at Glastonbury and Cambridge Folk Festival. Their new album *Lions and Butterflies* is due for release in October.

- www.theportraitsmusic.com
- www.facebook.com/theportraitsmusic
- www.twitter.com/the_portrait

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GREG HANCOCK OLD LADY

Greg Hancock returned to the UK three years ago after many years overseas and quickly established himself on

the acoustic scene as a performer and songwriter. His unique guitar style developed from attempting – and failing – to sound like Nic Jones, but perhaps his biggest influence on songwriting has been Joni Mitchell. His lyrics explore some of the quirkiest aspects of the human condition through portraits and stories, accompanied by unexpected chords and song structures.

- www.greghancockmusic.com
- www.facebook.com/Greg.Hancock.Music
- www.twitter.com/ghancocksinger

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EMILY PORTMAN DARKENING BELL

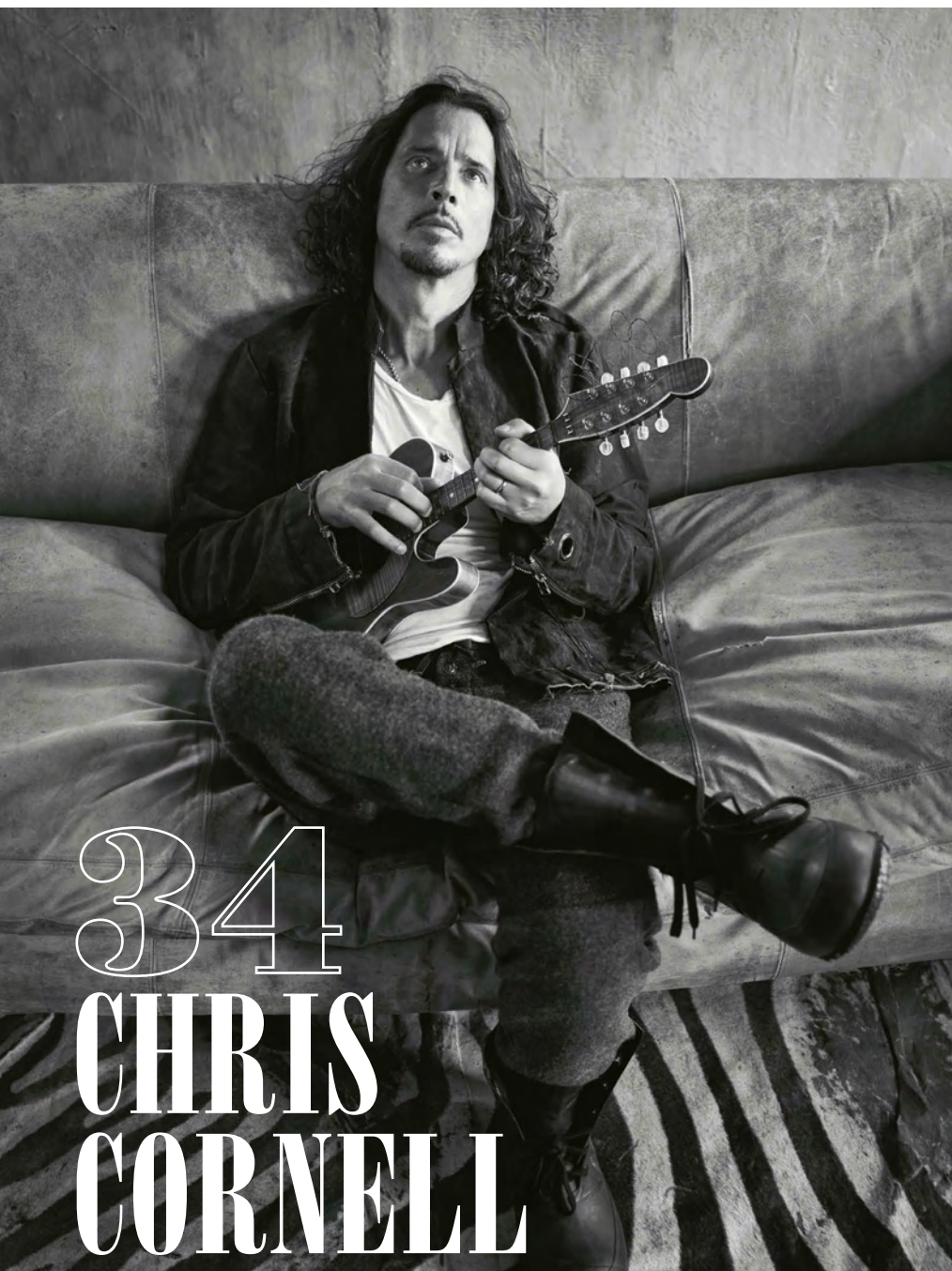
Emily Portman is a folk singer, banjo-player and songwriter hailed as 'one of the new British folk scene's

most beguiling presences' (*Uncut*). Emily is the winner of a BBC Radio Two Folk Award for best original song, and now she's back with *Coracle*, a vivid tour de force of finely-crafted songs that spin together folk motifs with personal reflections on motherhood and bereavement. *Coracle* has already caught the attention of Jarvis Cocker, received rave reviews and propelled Emily onto the cover of *ROOTS*.

- www.emilyportman.co.uk
- www.twitter.com/emilygportman
- www.facebook.com/emily.portman.56

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REBRANDED LONDON ACOUSTIC SHOW SCORES BIG WITH VISITORS

This year's rebranded show a big hit with punters. Dates for next year's show already confirmed – 10-11 September – at London Olympia

London Olympia was awash with the sound of acoustic instruments over the weekend 12-13 September, and, by all reports, 2015 was the best show yet.

This year's show clearly benefitted from its rebrand to the London Acoustic Show, in order to encompass associated stringed instruments, including ukuleles, banjos, dobros, mandolins and the like. The result was an eclectic range of instruments, as well as a diverse line-up of artists for both the main stage and the masterclass room.

Products on offer ranged from 50p picks

right through to The North American Guitar's 1994 John Monteleone Radio Flyer 18" archtop, costing £18,500. Reports indicate that show visitors clearly came to buy.

The event director and editor of *Acoustic*, Steve Harvey, said: "It's always difficult to know in advance whether people are coming to the show to buy, or to simply enjoy looking around and catch the main stage performances and masterclasses. Without doubt, this year's show will be remembered for how willing people were to wield their credit cards and purchase new instruments. Auden, for example, sold two guitars to one gentleman within an hour of the show opening."

Performance highlights of the weekend included a stunning set from the legendary chicken pickin' Albert Lee who, brought to the show in association with Ernie Ball and Strings & Things, knocked out a host of favourites including 'Country Boy' on his Huss & Dalton.

"I usually play electric with light gauge strings," he said after the performance,

"But, on an acoustic, that was something of a workout!"

In keeping with the inclusion of associated instruments, Grammy-award winning ukulele specialist, Daniel Ho, took the main stage by storm, dazzling the crowds with his flawless technique.

Acoustic favourite and former columnist Doyle Dykes showed why he's still regarded as one of the world's finest fingerstyle guitarists, playing the mainstage on Saturday and then holding an informative and inspirational masterclass on Sunday.

But it was Steve 'N' Seagulls from Finland who stole the show with their high-energy, fun-filled performances on both days, bashing through bluegrass versions of rock favourites such as 'Thunderstruck' and 'Seek and Destroy', thrashing their guitars, mandolins and banjos to within an inch of their lives.

Next year's show will take place on 10 and 11 September, 2016, at London Olympia. Watch this space for news of the artists and exhibitors to appear. Miss it and miss out.

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Korg UK has released two new tuners, which feature, for the first time, a vertical 3D visual meter. The Pitchblack Custom is designed for use on the floor and, in addition to allowing ultra-high ± 0.1 cent tuning precision, it features true bypass switching that prevents any colouration of tone. The three-dimensional lights and versatile display modes offer new standards of visibility, particularly on a darkened stage. The Pitchblack Custom is designed primarily with the professional in mind.

The GA Custom offers the same 3D visual meter and ± 0.1 cent tuning precision, but in a compact form. The unit features a flat body with rubberised exterior and boasts a high-sensitivity, built-in mic. The GA Custom is designed for use with acoustic, electric and bass guitars, as well as orchestral instruments. The RRP's are £29.95 for the GA Custom, and £69 for the Pitchblack.

Check out www.korg.co.uk for all the details.



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Ortega has specialised in making nylon string guitars for almost three decades, and it has revealed its most exclusive series yet. The Private Room series, which comprises a range of 'suites', has its genesis in the selection of handpicked tonewoods, which are crafted into exclusive instruments.

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The WCG18CE is crafted out of a carved select spruce top and mahogany back and sides, as well as a mahogany neck. Equipped with die cast tuners and Fishman Isys+ 301T electronics, the Comfort Series guitars also features a rosewood fretboard and bridge with abalone rosette.

The Washburn Comfort Series WCG18CE is available now in Natural and Black finishes at £279.

For more info head to www.soundtech.co.uk/washburn.





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*Competition entries must arrive no later than the closing date specified. The winner will be announced on 26 October 2015. Only the winner will be contacted. One entry per household. Image(s) of winner may be used for future editorial or advertising purposes. The winner will be selected at random from all the correct entries. No cash alternative is offered. *Acoustic* magazine reserves the right to substitute the prize for an alternative of equal or greater value.

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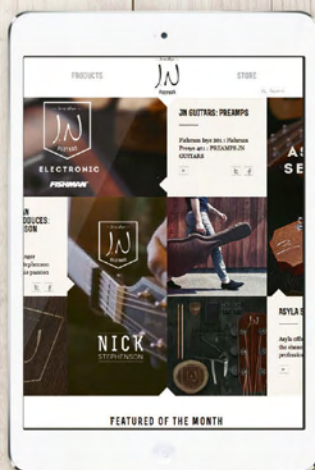
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ASK THE EXPERTS

TIPS ON NAVIGATING THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL PRESSURES OF LIFE AS A MUSICIAN...

Working as a musician is a tough gig. Our industry places a range of pressures on musicians, which can result in physical or psychological harm. Yet this is often dismissed as part of the job. So what basic steps can you take to protect yourself?

PROTECTING YOUR EARS

Hearing damage is one of the few things that affects all musicians, regardless of where they work. It is a major hazard so you need to protect your ears at all times.

The Control Of Noise At Work Regulations 2005 means your employer – if you have one – must take steps to protect your hearing. If they don't, they could face prosecution.

If you work freelance, there are still things you can do to protect yourself. Our Musicians' Hearing Passport, in partnership with Musicians' Hearing Services and BAPAM, offers an in-depth examination and report, advice on hearing protection and conservation, and regular check-ups.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEALTH

Working as a professional musician, you should also think of yourself as an athlete according to physiotherapists who treat music-related injuries. There are small steps you can take that can help you protect your health in the long run.

For example, warm up before you play, whether that's a practice, lesson, rehearsal or gig. Take regular breaks from rehearsals, demanding repertoires and schedules. Ensure that you have proper seating, which is the correct height for you and allows for movement and rest – most musicians should have a forward-sloping seat. Pay attention to your body, learn to recognise healthy fatigue and stop before it hurts. Accept when you are tired and take a break, and ensure you get enough sleep and rest.

You may consider seeing a specialist, such as a physio with a music background. MU

members can get in touch with the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (bapam.org.uk) for specialist advice and appointments.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

Increasingly, musicians are being asked to provide risk assessments and this is often being added into contracts. At its most basic, this means listing the tasks you carry out, the possible risks and what you are doing to reduce them. It may also cover how you rehearse and practise, particularly for noise exposure or musculoskeletal matters.

EQUALITY AT WORK

You have the right to work with dignity and respect. Yet a survey of union members across the arts and entertainment sectors found 56 per cent respondents had been bullied, harassed or discriminated against (Creating Without Conflict Survey, 2013). This disproportionately affects women, and freelancers. So if you suspect that you may be the victim of bullying, harassment, stress or inequality, talk to your Regional Office (theMU.org).

GET IN TOUCH

The MU provides advice on all of the above, including a risk assessment template, and more on protecting your hearing and health. Find out more via theMU.org or, if you are a member, contact your Regional Office for specialist help.

For more information, visit: theMU.org

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A Crafter AGE-400 acoustic guitar is shown diagonally across the frame. The body is a sunburst finish, transitioning from a deep red at the edges to a bright orange in the center. The neck is dark wood with light-colored frets and blue dot inlays. The headstock is black with the 'Crafter' logo in white script and six orange tuning pegs. The background is a high-resolution satellite image of the Earth, showing the Americas, the Atlantic Ocean, and swirling white clouds.

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MADISEN WARD AND THE MAMA BEAR

Acoustic guitar super duo Madisen Ward and the Mama Bear are in the UK to tour with Sufjan Stevens and promote their excellent **Skeleton Crew** album. We met to chat about strong bonds, being called 'genre-less', and naming guitars

WORDS: GLENN KIMPTON IMAGES: SWELL PUBLICITY

Things have been rolling along at a rapid pace for Missouri-dwelling Madisen Ward and his mother Ruth. This year has seen the release of *Skeleton Crew*, a set of 12 minimally produced, intimately performed songs, that has catapulted them into the big league. "It's been all at once," admits Madisen, 27. "We went from playing in little coffee houses where we live to going all over the world. It's pretty crazy."

Starting out in small venues, the duo quickly turned heads, with people wanting to hear more of their self-penned tales and narratives. "We felt quite quickly that there was a real connection with the audience," says Madisen. "They seemed to like what we were writing and what we were playing. They began requesting original music instead of the stuff that we were covering, so it was then that we started to realise there was a unique sound associated with the music that my mom and I were making. We realised that it was becoming its own brand, so we decided to become a duo full time, and I'm really glad that we made that decision."

Unlike Madisen, Ruth has been playing music in Missouri for many years. "Yes I have," she says with her semi-permanent chuckle. "I came first; I'm the chicken and he's the egg! I've been singing professionally since I was 19 years old. I played guitar and sung in and out of coffee houses, and Madisen used to come in and hear me play. Eventually he started learning to play and I soon realised that he had a real gift for

songwriting, so when I went off to sing, I would have him accompany me and he'd sing during my breaks. The people enjoyed what they heard, so we started singing together and the rest is history."

Much to the potential chagrin of many readers, Madisen has only been playing guitar, singing and writing songs for about eight years. And he seemed like such a nice guy. "I know!" he sighs. "People hate hearing that sort of thing. But, in a way I feel like although I never wrote personally, I've been around that singer-songwriter lifestyle for as far back as I can remember, so I feel like I was introduced to it all pretty early on. It was late high school when I started properly. I never wanted to be a musician really; it was something that really sprung out on me later on. But I really fell in love with all of it and it's become a real passion."

While recording *Skeleton Crew*, producer Jim Abiss apparently described the music as 'genre-less'. I wonder how significant an accolade that is. "It's very important to us," says Madisen. "A lot of musicians that we love are very difficult to place in terms of genre, so when Jim said that I couldn't have been more thrilled. I definitely don't want people to begin pigeonholing us or saying where it comes from or sounds like. That's real important to us."

Although a mercurial record, there are strong narratives and themes running through *Skeleton Crew*. "I wouldn't say we intentionally write about themes," says Ruth. "It's more about how we are feeling

at the time of writing. Sometimes I might write more emotionally about how I feel and sometimes it's all more playful. I think that's the way it is for most songwriters."

"I think so," agrees Madisen. "For us we like to be as real as we can be within the emotion, but the song itself could be completely fictional. We like to be very real through fiction... if that's not too contradictory! I think what's important for us is that it feels real and organic, so I suppose that's one theme we work towards."

Two standout songs from the album are 'Dead Daffodils' and 'Undertaker Juniper', both narrative songs tackling the sensitive subject of mortality. "The thing with the 'Dead Daffodils' and that 'Juniper' song," says Ruth, "is that they both make you think, and it's all about things that make you think. It's much like watching a movie that makes you think, and that's what I really love about those two songs especially. There are playful songs on the record you can enjoy, but those two are special and I think that's the reason."

Madisen adds: "I was talking just this morning about songs that veer towards the dark end of things and that's a real important emotion to me; it's like they are the most real of emotions. I was specifically talking about Sufjan Stevens's new album *Carrie & Lowell* and they were mentioning how dark it was, but I don't feel dark from that album at all, I think it's very real and very expressive and I can really relate to that. I think the ultimate challenge is to potentially go very dark and remain playful; that's a real interest for me."



It's always remarkable when a band can find a strong distinctive sound with the most minimal of arrangements. Gillian Welch nails it particularly well, I suggest, but it's a notoriously difficult route to take.

"It's definitely one of the big challenges," agrees Madisen, "but I think the set-up adds a lot to the sound we are trying to create. It remains to be seen whether or not we choose more accompaniment in the future; I'd really love to keep things as simple as possible and I think that becomes a challenge in its own right."

Ruth is also remaining loyal to their current minimal arrangement. "Yes, I think it becomes much harder to create something that people can relate to and enjoy when there's no big band to hide behind. You're very exposed and it's a challenge we're all stepping up to."

Of course, the lack of adornments in the sound only further expose what must be the strongest of duo bonds, in a mother and son. "We certainly keep each other very honest," laughs Madisen, "and it's very humbling to be on the road and playing with somebody who knows you so well. The main advantage to this whole thing is that we're doing it with somebody we know. Neither of us has been here before, but we're doing it together."

"I've gotten to know Madisen from a different angle," continues Ruth, "and allowed him his space on the road. But while we're here, we are business partners and musicians first and mother and son on the back end. And it works well like that."

Are there disadvantages to such an arrangement? "No!" they both shout. "Man, my buddies say they could never go on the road with their mom," laughs Madisen, "but my mom's a great musician and I've grown up with her as a musician, so for me it was not even a choice."

The discussion moves to the duo's guitar choices. "I'm kinda precious about my guitar," admits Madisen. "I mean, if it went in a fire it wouldn't be the end of the world; I try not to get too attached. But this is a pretty special guitar to me. It came from a family landlord who I knew from about the age of four and who saw my mom play and who played himself for years. He really encouraged me to play guitar and just a few years back he gave me this Taylor guitar that he'd played for years. I was over at his house and he just said 'that guitar over there is yours now; I want you to play a guitar that I really love and that's got some money behind it.' So that's the one I play now and

that meant a lot to me, that gift and that faith in our music."

"I play two nylon string guitars," chimes in Ruth. "One is an Alvarez Yairi and the other is a Cordoba. My Alvarez I got back in the late 70s; I play it with a pick and the reason is because I like the sound I get, but also because Willie Nelson plays his nylon guitar with a pick, and I thought if Willie can play his nylon with a pick then it must be okay."

"My Cordoba I call Little Red because of the scratch plate, and I really like that one as well; in fact, that's taken the place of Little Blue, which is the Alvarez..."

"You're opening a can of worms here, Mom!" shouts Madisen. The next 30 seconds is a cacophony of laughing and shouting, before Ruth tunes back in: "The Alvarez wasn't working so well through the speakers, so I switched to the Cordoba. Little Red doesn't have the sentimental value of Little Blue, but like Madisen said, if they were both stolen or lost it wouldn't be the end, I'd just buy another guitar... and call it Little Yellow!"

I ask what 'Little' Madisen's Taylor is. "I don't name my guitars," he laughs, "you can name it if you want; you can be part of the family." ■

Skeleton Crew is out now on Glassnote Music.
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DAVID RAWLINGS

*David Rawlings tells us how he is remaining loyal to the aesthetic and recording processes that first turned him onto traditional country music with his new album **Nashville Obsolete...***

WORDS: JULIAN PIPER

For a man recovering from the trauma of having been bitten by a poisonous spider, something that laid him low for five days, David Rawlings is sounding in pretty good shape. "I'm mainly better, but it was a bigger deal than I expected!" he laughs. "I was in Colorado; the two main poisonous spiders in the US are the black widow and the brown recluse. In Nashville we do get the brown recluse, it gives you a pretty ugly bite and you feel a little sick, but because I never saw the spider in question I don't know which it was."

It's been 20 years since David Rawlings teamed up with fellow Berklee student Gillian Welch, and the pair began honing their individual take on old timey country music. Although always billed as Gillian Welch, Rawlings' spiky, inventive guitar work has always been as integral to the duo's sparse dark sound as Welch's soulful vocals. After five albums together, Grammy nominations and adding to the musical soundtrack of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, Rawlings moved centre stage in 2009 with *A Friend Of A Friend*, the first album by a string band he called the Dave Rawlings Machine.

With members of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers and the Old Crow Medicine Show on hand, Rawlings hit the road for some widely acclaimed shows which also featured John Paul Jones from Led Zeppelin on mandolin. With Gillian Welch sharing vocals, the band's latest album *Nashville Obsolete*, features seven Rawlings original songs, and as the grainy cover shot of the band implies – something that might well have featured in a collection of Walker

Evans' 1930s dustbowl photographs – it's about as pure as acoustic music gets.

As he began by explaining, Rawlings' fascination with traditional music goes back a long way. "Country music has roots everywhere in the US, and from when I was three or four years old, country music ebbed and flowed onto the pop charts. When I was a kid I was always attracted to 'story songs'; you'd hear Jim Croce or Kenny Rogers sing 'The Gambler' on the radio, songs that were country music but people didn't think of them that way," Rawlings chuckled. "I didn't identify myself as a country music fan, but if I heard a song I liked, I found I could memorise it in my head. I didn't become a musician until much later on, but somehow those songs always stayed in my head.

"Then when I was 13 or 14 years old, my dad called me into the house to hear 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', the first Bob Dylan song I ever heard. 'C'mon in and hear this song with all these words,' then I got to hear Neil Young, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Grateful Dead, all that 60s folk/rock, and that became what I wanted to play. But I began playing guitar by accident; a friend wanted me to play guitar behind him, and at that point as much as I loved music, it would never have occurred to me to play myself. He said 'Get a guitar and we'll go and enter a talent show.' I played guitar for maybe only half an hour, and realised that I was going to be good at it, I picked it up quickly; my hand and eye co-ordination was pretty good, something I attribute that to the fact that I was among the first generation that ever played video games – and I played them a lot! Like everyone I was terrible at so many things

growing up, I knew what the line was between being a professional basketball player, but with playing music, I didn't know what the line was. Just thought if I kept on playing I'd get really good, and I did."

At Berklee College, Rawlings found himself surrounded by Steve Vai wannabes, "There was a lot of shredding going on," he says. "I really hadn't been playing that long and when I look at the time line, I was the youngest boy in my class; I was 18 years old and had only been playing guitar two years. All I did was take guitar classes, and spent all my time in little tiny cubicles where I'd just play until four o'clock in the morning. I only had to look around, everyone had been playing longer, and was way better than I was, so I thought 'Jesus – if I'm going to do this, I need to make up for a lot of lost time'. And then I found a teacher who ran a country ensemble, met people who were interested in bluegrass music, old timey stuff and folk music, and we were forced to band together. I played in a country band two nights a week, a punk band with friends from high school, and tons of other bands – I just played in front of people."

After pairing up with Gillian Welch, the pair relocated to Nashville. For the duo it must have been a logical step, but in the eyes of the entrenched music mafia, their approach to music must have seemed archaic. "It wasn't hard to understand why people might have thought that," he admits now. "What we were doing bore zero resemblance to anything happening commercially, except what they called the new traditionalist thing – people like Randy Travis, Dwight Yoakam, Steve Earle, Emmy Lou Harris,



all people we liked. But another reason for being drawn there was because Townes Van Zandt was around; Townes was so underappreciated at that moment in time. Gillian and I would go and see him and there'd be 40 people in a 200-seat room.

"There were some female artists like Mary Chapin Carpenter or Kathy Mattea, having some success on country radio, and Nashville is a creature that sees something that's working, and then duplicates it. So some of the business people we met thought Gillian could get herself a little band and play the country radio game; write folk-based country songs, head down that road. But that wasn't really where our hearts were, we wanted to sound like the Blue Sky Boys or the Campbell Brothers."

David admits those early days in Nashville were tough. "We played around little places and made whatever we could make. In 1993 I had a calendar and would write down everything we made; it was \$300 that year! I don't want to make it sound grim, because to be young and playing guitar for a living was great, and by and large we were getting a good response for what we did. We could feel we were developing, getting a little bit better every couple of months, and getting to learn which songs suited us."

Two years later they were heard playing by producer T Bone Burnett, who shared their

vision of recreating their minimal live sound. "We went out to California with T Bone and made *Revival*, by which point we had a good pile of songs – 18 or so that people really liked. We only had to make a record with 10 of them, so it gave us a lot of freedom and helped us focus on the vision we had."

Rawlings has long played a 1935 Epiphone Olympic archtop guitar, an instrument he discovered in a friend's basement. "I thought it had a nice tone, so I got it fixed up and when I played it in front of a microphone it sounded great," he enthused. "In retrospect, there were extremely good wood workers in this country in 1935, and some great Brazilian rosewood coming out of these forests. People were building incredibly good guitars out of incredibly good wood. It just doesn't happen anymore. If someone could walk up to me and give me a guitar that sounds as good as mine, if it was made yesterday, I wouldn't care. Likewise when we started playing onstage using a microphone, we realised it sounded a lot better than using pickups, which made our guitars sound unnatural. And then you do end up with an aesthetic that's created by all that kind of thing."

The pair work so hard at eschewing modern approaches to music making – their Woodland Studio located in east Nashville, is a facsimile of RCA's legendary Studio B, used by the likes of

Roy Orbison and Elvis Presley – that I wondered whether there is a point, at which they no longer have to strive at authenticity. Maybe like the old blues singers, they become inseparable from their music...

"There are certain aspects of what you might call the outward aesthetic of what we do and who we are. Gillian and I have always been drawn to a certain kind of quality. If you look at the kind of recording gear we have, and the equipment T Bone was using, this was stuff that was already dated in the 90s. But that recording gear was the pinnacle of 40 years of recording technology; they were making the best mics in the 50s and 60s, the best recording consoles in the 60s and the best tape machines the 80s.

"By that time everyone knew what was what, and all the good stuff ended up in recording studios, before digital recording came in and people opted for convenience. Why do we need that big machine when we can do it all in this tiny little box?" he snorts. "It'll sound like shit but who cares? They took it all apart and changed it for no good reason. Am I trying to be musically obsolete or archaic? No, I'm just trying to get the good shit!" ■

Nashville Obsolete by the Dave Rawlings Machine is now on release.



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FRANK TURNER

We caught up with folk-punk hero Frank Turner at the Cambridge Folk Festival, on the eve of the release of his sixth studio album, *Positive Songs For Negative People*

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES

Frank Turner is a man of contradictions. He was the singer of post-hardcore band Million Dead, but educated at Eton, where Prince William was a contemporary. He learned to sing and play Nirvana songs before he was a teenager, but taught himself Counting Crows and Levellers albums to please his older sister. His specialist subject on *Celebrity Mastermind* was heavy metal behemoths Iron Maiden but he now makes his living as an acoustic singer-songwriter, which explains why we are meeting in his dressing room at the Cambridge Folk Festival.

Despite a virtual conveyor belt of journalists passing through his temporary abode for the day, Frank remains cheerful, erudite and charming, remembering his early days as a heavy metal and grunge fan. "I started off loving Iron Maiden, and still do of course, and then I branched out into punk and hardcore. I can see, looking back, that my older sister's influence has come through in my career; her three favourite bands were Counting Crows, Soul Asylum and the Levellers. I had a Fender Stratocaster copy, the kind you get from mail order chains, and I was really into Pantera. I did have an acoustic as well, and I soon discovered that playing Pantera songs on an acoustic is actually pretty difficult, but I learned albums like *August And Everything After* and *Levelling The Land* so I could play the songs for my sister. I wasn't really into that style of music, but I can see that it has a lasting

effect on the musical direction I have taken."

Like any successful musician, Frank Turner has seen various mistruths about his life in the press – nothing libellous, but he is keen to point out that hearing Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* album was not quite the Damascene moment that some sections of the mainstream media would have us believe. "I know that comes from a press release somewhere!" says Frank with a laugh. "It was a great record, and I do love it, but it's not as important in my albums of influence as, say, *The American Recordings* set by Johnny Cash.

"I think what I was learning at the time was that you don't have to have screaming vocals and shrieking guitars and pounding drums to be heavy. I was listening to the *Nebraska* album on the way over here today, and the impact is caused by the fact that it is all so stripped back and minimal. The last line of the title track, 'Well sir, I guess there's just a meanness in this world,' is such a full-on hardcore line, and he whispers it. When I first heard that when I was about 19, it was a completely new idea to me, to put that level of impact into a song without a corresponding level of musical ferocity behind it was just stunning."

Anyone fortunate enough to have a career as an acoustic musician knows that touring is going to form the backbone of their existence. Attitudes to touring vary, some artists regard it as a necessary evil, and others, like Frank, embrace it completely. "I do love touring, I always have. Tonight's show will be number

1,704 over the last 10 years. I love the fact that it makes life go slower, I think about what I was doing last week, and it already feels like it must be last month, and I think that is excellent. I know it sounds slightly melodramatic, but it is one thing in life that I am actually really good at. I know how to schedule a tour, I know how to build a live show, and I know how to play a live show. That does make me feel good; I feel I am playing to my strengths here.

"A lot of people think that touring is a really rootless existence, but I believe it is exactly the opposite. I have far more routine to my life when I am out on the road than I do when I am at home. I have a tour manager who tells me where we are going, where we are going to stay, what time to get up and be ready to go, and all that sort of detail. I get up, I work out, I eat some food, I do the sound check, I eat dinner, I play the show, I have some drinks afterwards with friends, I go to bed, and the whole thing starts again the next day.

"Some people think that touring is like a holiday, a period of time away from real life, but for me it is real life. I know this sounds a bit macho, but for nine years, I actually didn't have a home to go back to. I have got a flat now, but I am hardly ever there because I tour more or less all the time. So for me, touring is not the odd part of my life, it's the normal part. The odd part for me is when I come off the road and I genuinely have to wonder what to do with myself all day. It's weird, because all the structure is gone. Keith Richards says, if



he wants to know if he is in the US or not, he rolls over in bed when he wakes up and looks at the pack of Marlboro on the bedside table. The American Marlboros have white tips, the rest of the world have brown, so instantly he knows if he is in America. I'm not quite like that, but I can understand where that thinking starts from."

When you get a chance to talk to an acoustic musician like Frank Turner, there are two pieces of information that you should come away with – the guitars he plays, and how he writes the songs to play on them. So Frank: let's do guitars first. "I play Gibson guitars, and they are very good to me. As an endorsee, they look after me very well. I have a pair of Hummingbirds that I work with on stage, and they are wonderful guitars."

"I realised recently that I hadn't bought a guitar for a while, so I went out with the intention of buying something different for a change. I wanted a vintage Gibson, so I gave myself a budget, as you do, and of course I went way over the top of that. It turns out I am extremely susceptible to salesmanship, which was something I didn't know."

"I bought a 1957 Country Western which is the most fabulous guitar. Everything is original, the glue, the tuning pegs, the case,

it's all there and it is just gorgeous. Since I have had it I have stopped hanging out with my friends, I have just been at home learning to get the best out my new guitar, and just enjoying it so much. I don't consider myself to be a really top-notch technically proficient guitarist, but I do try to improve. I am learning bluegrass flatpicking now, I have the occasional lesson when time permits, and I am enjoying doing that. It is for my enjoyment, but in my experience, these things have a habit of feeding through into the professional side of things, so who knows, there may be a bluegrass album surfacing in a couple of years' time."

And writing songs? "I hate to be a disappointment because I know that people love to know how musicians they like write the songs, but I don't know. That is the honest answer to the question about how I write songs. I am sort of aware that there is a time when songs are not there, and then they are, but I never really know how they get there. I can assure you that there is nothing as obvious as a pattern about writing, no getting up, having some breakfast and a coffee and then sitting down with a guitar and seeing what develops, I know I don't work like that."

One of Frank's crowning achievements was playing the 20,000-capacity O2 arena in

2014, where he told the crowd that he was 'playing songs designed to be heard in bars'. So does he vary his approach based on the size of the venue he is playing? "I do think that the art of entertainment and performing is very different from the art of being a musician and a songwriter. I put a lot of time and effort into perfecting the art of entertaining an audience. Whatever size of venue I am playing, my job is to entertain everyone that is there in the room, so if that means reaching to the back of the O2, then it's my job to do that. There are techniques for doing that, and before I played that show, I put a lot of thought into how I was going to make it work."

"My first thought was to completely scrap my current set, and work up a whole new list of songs, and figure out a way to play them. Then I thought about it, and I realised that the reason why I was in a position to draw a crowd to a venue of the size of the O2 was because of the songs I sang, and the way I sang them, so to abandon all that and do something totally different was simply not going to work, it would just be bizarre. I understood that there are far more similarities in playing small and large venues than there are differences, certainly as far as playing acoustic music goes, so I went with what I do, and it was fine." ■

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J O H N J O R G E N S O N

What do you call a man who releases three albums at once, all in different styles and all using different instrumentation and personnel? Well, John's a good start...

WORDS: ALISON RICHTER IMAGES: PIPER FERGUSON AND SENOR MCGUIRE

John Jorgenson has never been one to do things the easy or usual way. It's not enough that he mastered piano, clarinet, saxophone, and guitar as a youngster; in adulthood he added mandolin, pedal steel, and bouzouki. Successful careers as a bluegrass, country, and rock guitarist weren't enough, so he mastered the intricacies and challenges of gypsy jazz. Surely one band isn't enough, so he has three: The John Jorgenson Bluegrass Band – also known as J2B2; The John Jorgenson Quintet – his gypsy jazz ensemble; and the self-explanatory John Jorgenson Electric Band. All three were set to perform at the Guitar Town Festival in Copper Mountain, Colorado, at the time of this interview. In October, he'll be part of the Autour De La Guitare Fall 2015 tour of France with Robben Ford, Larry Carlton, Johnny Clegg, and others. There is also a three-CD box set, *Divertuoso*, on the way. While most artists compile greatest hits, outtakes, and bonus tracks into their box sets, *Divertuoso* features three new CDs from his three bands. Jorgenson is nothing if not driven.

The electric album, *Gifts From The Flood*, resulted from the Nashville floods of 2010. Like many other musicians, Jorgenson's instruments and amps spent a week under water. "It made me appreciate the instruments and amps that were able to be revived," he says. "I was so happy whenever one of them was repaired that I would play it a lot, and I started getting melodies and songs from this experience. There were so many of them that I decided to make an album of that music." *Gifts From The Flood* began in Nashville. During its creation, Jorgenson moved

back to California, where he completed the recording, playing all of the instruments except drums. "It's a very personal project," he says. "It was interrupted by many other things, touring and other projects, so it wasn't a straight line from beginning to end, but happily, it did get finished."

The gypsy jazz album, *Returning*, was also influenced by Jorgenson's move. "That album was recorded mostly in California, and I also returned to a slightly different way of recording," he says. "There were a couple of remote sessions. I recorded the violin parts in the violinist's home in Massachusetts, and some of the percussion parts in Nashville. It's an album of songs that I composed with the quintet in mind, and a couple of adaptations, one a Tchaikovsky piece that I love from the ballet *Swan Lake*, and an old song from the 1930s called 'I've Got My Fingers Crossed,' which I just wanted to sing."

The bluegrass album, *Music From The Crow's Nest*, was recorded in Nashville at Sheryl Crow's studio, hence its title. It was the quickest of the three projects, recorded by an ensemble that Jorgenson put together rather easily: Jon Randall, with whom he played in Earl Scruggs' band, Herb Pedersen, his colleague from the Desert Rose Band, and Mark Fain, a longtime friend who had recently exited Ricky Skaggs' band, Kentucky Thunder. "I got everybody together and it came together fairly quickly," he says. "Pretty soon we were on the Grand Ole Opry, and the combination of people melded really well."

Three albums and three styles of music called

for three sets of instruments and recording techniques. For *Returning*, Jorgenson relied primarily on his 1942 Selmer guitar, the same type used by Django Reinhardt, credited originator and master of gypsy jazz. "It's a very responsive and special guitar," he says. "I don't tour with it, and I don't record all the time with it, but for this album, again, with the returning theme, I returned to that guitar, and every time I tried to use a different one, I ended up going back to that one. The microphone that I use with that guitar is kind of unusual. It's an old RCA ribbon mic, I guess from the 1950s. I find that it's the best mic for that particular guitar. Also on this album I played the bouzouki quite a bit. It's an old bouzouki that I found in a shop in Los Angeles, and it's a great-sounding instrument. I also played the mandolin, so there is a little crossover [with the bluegrass album] there. I used my main mandolin, a 1980 Gibson F5L, which I've had since it was new. I played a Gibson mandocello from the 1920s, which is a beautiful-sounding instrument, a Leblanc L27 clarinet, and an unusual model of soprano sax, a King saxello made in the early 1950s. It's got a straight body with a curved neck and a curved bell."

His miking preference when recording the Selmer is to place the RCA ribbon mic "below the bridge and not right in front of the soundhole. If it gets too much on the soundhole, it gets boomy, and I don't like it up by the strings too much because then it gets rattly. I like to really hear the face of the guitar."

On *From The Crow's Nest*, Jorgenson played his Gibson mandolin, a Kentucky KM 1000



with an aluminum bridge, and a Blueridge BR-260A acoustic guitar. "For the mandolin, I like the sound coming from the lower F-hole on the bottom side," he says. "I think a combination of a Coles ribbon mic and a Neumann KM84 were used on the mandolin. Gary Paczosa engineered the album, so he was in charge of miking. He probably used the same mics for my guitar, and they would be more in a traditional place, around where the neck meets the body and probably four or five inches away. It depends on the guitar. Often I like to get a shimmering sound out of my 12-string, so I keep that mic up toward the fingerboard so as to not get too much body sound and more of a stringy sound. A mic that sounds good for that guitar would be something like a [Sennheiser] 421 or an AKG 414."

He played numerous guitars on *Gifts From The Flood*, with each song named after the guitar on which it was written and usually recorded. Among them: his Takamine 12-string signature acoustic, a Danelectro electric sitar, 1961 Gibson SG Les Paul, 1968 Paisley Telecaster, 1983 Sunburst, 1962 reissue Telecaster, 1983 Sunburst, 1964 SG Custom that originally belonged to Alan Holdsworth, 1957 Stratocaster, a Firebird, an Olympic White Jazzmaster, and a mid-1960s Silvertone. He also used several amps — a Danelectro, Marshall head and cab, and several Vox models, including his favorite, a 1964 JMI Vox AC30, and an assortment of

pedals. He also played a Hammond B3, and on one cut played clarinet and bassoon.

"For electric guitars I often use the Sennheiser 409, which sounds really good close to the amp, and the 414, which sounds better if it's a little further away. I put it a little bit left or right of the centre of one of the speakers. I usually don't mic more than one of the speakers; maybe six inches away is a nice sound. If I want to get a more roomy sound, I'll move it even further away, but the danger of that is getting too washy of a sound when you're mixing it."

Live and in the studio, Jorgensen uses specific picks and picking techniques for each type of music. "The more I can control my right hand and choose what it does, as opposed to have it be by default setting, and the more I can intentionally pick how I want, the better," he says. "I find that each instrument usually has a different pick that sounds good on that instrument. The pick that I use for the gypsy jazz guitar is quite thick. It's a 5mm Wegen pick and it's got a bevel on it, so when I have that guitar and that pick in my hand, it all goes together and it feels right. When I'm playing the electric guitar, I want a Fender medium pick because the strings are so much lighter and the hand position is different. I also use some hybrid picking for the electric, where I use my middle and ring fingers along with the pick. With the mandolin I use either a fairly thin tortoise shell

pick or a smaller Wegen pick that's maybe 1 mm thick, and I use that same type of pick on the flattop guitar. When I'm set up with the right instrument and the right pick, the picking comes naturally. For the bouzouki, for example, to get the right tone I like a pointed tortoise shell pick, which I don't particularly like on the other picks. I don't want to play jazz licks on the mandolin. If I have a Les Paul in my hands, I don't want to play gypsy jazz licks because it doesn't sound right. But, having said all that, sometimes I do use techniques that cross each other. Not often, but every once in a while there will be a gypsy jazz technique that I might apply to the electric guitar, and there might be a mandolin run that I try to play on the acoustic guitar. I seem like I'm contradicting myself, but it's not hard and fast, but each instrument does have its own technique and set of skills."

The gypsy jazz technique requires that he play close to bridge and use multiple downstrokes, with thumb straight and hand in a natural grip, not anchored to the guitar. Jorgensen faced some positioning challenges early on. "When I was first touring playing gypsy jazz, I did have some problems with my right elbow and right arm," he says. "I was looking at videos of other players to see what their position was, and I realized I had to rest my bicep on the lower bout of the guitar, so that my elbow was free to move without having to be also held by the muscles. That allowed me to use more gravity and less physical power to do the playing. If you slam the guitar with a heavy right hand, but you're not clean, you're not going to get very good results. So power has to come through the precision"

Completing *Divertuoso* — including the artwork, credits, and packaging — in addition to tour dates, interviews, and his many other commitments was, in Jorgensen's words, "a monumental task." It's also a project that goes against the grain in the age of downloading, where listeners often purchase only select tracks. While it might have been easier to schedule three individual CD releases, his manager suggested, and Jorgensen agreed, that it was best to present them as a whole. "He thought that even though these are three completely different albums and styles and groups of musicians, it's still me in the forefront. So if they were put out separately, they would possibly compete with each other, but put out together, it might give a large overall view of my musical life at once. I like the idea, because living the musical life that I've had, it can be a little bit fragmented at times. People that like one style that I play may not even know that I do another style, or have maybe never even heard it. So it's sort of a bold and risky experiment, and as it's coming up soon, I guess we'll see how successful that experiment is." ■



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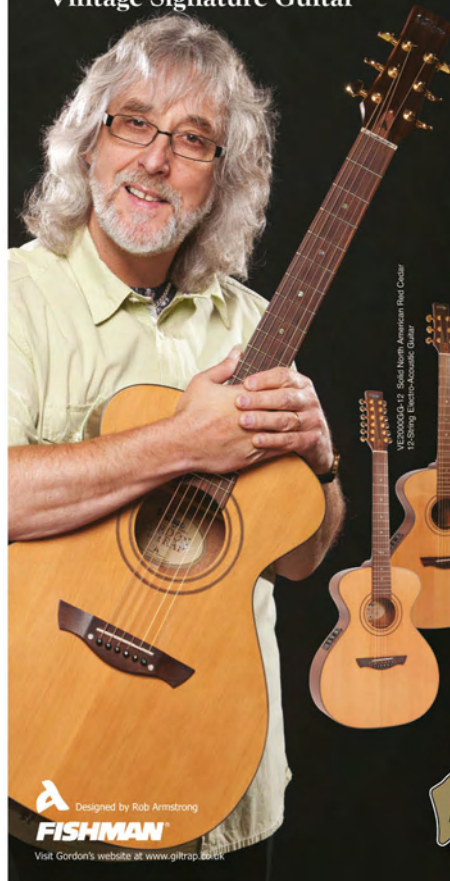


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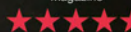
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C H R I S C O R N E L L

With a four-octave vocal range, a 16-year solo career, a CV that boasts fronting Soundgarden and Audioslave, umpteen Grammy awards and over 30 million album sales behind him – not to mention being the first American male ever to sing a James Bond theme – you’d think the mighty Chris Cornell would have this songwriting thing down to a fine art. Nothing could be further from the truth, he tells Joel McIver

WORDS: JOEL McIVER IMAGES: JEFF LIPSKY

Chris Cornell, 51 years old and a legend to thousands – maybe millions – of rock fans, is an enigma. Thirty-one years since he formed the Seattle grunge icons Soundgarden, and 14 since he took up the mic with the supergroup Audioslave, he’s about to release his fourth solo studio album, *Higher Truth*, and tour it with only an acoustic guitar, hence our chat with him today. As one of America’s genuine rock stars, Cornell should really be on top of the world. Is he? Well, listen up...

“I can write songs for three days in a row,” he tells us, “but on day four, I’m in a different mood, and it suddenly feels to me like I’ve completely gone in the wrong direction and I wasn’t aware of it. I don’t know what creates that. You know when you hear your own voice on an answering machine? It’s whatever that phenomenon is. There’s something I’m hearing in me, something

inherent that I hate. It’s unpredictable, and I’ve never been able to figure out a way to get past it.”

He adds: “I remember writing songs for a Soundgarden album in 1991, where I spent six months writing about eight songs, and I threw all of them out, and it was right that I did that because they weren’t good. I just went down the wrong road.”

With *Higher Truth*, this dreaded switch in perspective – should we call it ‘answering machine syndrome’, maybe? – struck, and struck hard, recalls Cornell. “This album took a while: it’s been over two years of writing the songs, maybe longer,” he says. “The songwriting process was interrupted by solo tours and Soundgarden tours and other projects. The first songs I wrote, ‘Nearly Forgot My Broken Heart’, ‘Dead Wishes’ and ‘Murderer Of Blue Skies’, I wrote a couple of years ago, and I dumped them at one point. I didn’t think I was gonna use any of those

songs – but then, having time away and doing other things and coming back, I had a different perspective. I thought, ‘No, these are great, I’m gonna record these’. It’s been a drawn-out process compared to some of my other albums, just because of how much I’ve been touring and busy. But it’s good – I think it’s good.”

Like many songwriters among us, Cornell would rather not endure the agonies of songwriting over a drawn-out period. Getting them all out in one fell swoop would be much more fun. As he says, “I do like that: I prefer that energy of a blast of creativity that yields a bunch of songs, and it’s fresh and brand new and feels like a whole new world. But the thing is, you can’t plan on that – it either happens or it doesn’t happen. I can’t force that to happen. I think it happens with collaborations a lot, because you’re reacting to other people.”

He continues: “Audioslave’s a good example of that, or the beginning of Soundgarden, where you’re playing with musicians for the first time. Somehow you’re reacting to each other instinctively, and it’s a brand new thing and you write 15 songs in a week. As a solo artist, with 30 years of songwriting, it happens two or

three songs at a time, as opposed to a whole album in a couple of weeks. That’s always the goal, though. The goal is always, ‘I’m gonna write an album in two weeks.’”

Cornell is in good spirits, but there’s conviction in his tone when he says: “It’s totally annoying! It’s something where I’ll rip my hair out about it. I think my wife gets the worst of it, because I have a studio in my house. I’ll be off in the corner, working all day long, and I’ll come out – and she can tell by looking at me if I’m having a great time or not. I’ll be working on a song and I’ll be super-excited, and then I’ll come out and say, ‘It doesn’t work. It sucks. I wasted my time. It’s horrible!’”

Still, the creative angst has paid off with *Higher Truth*, an album loaded with acoustic goodness and the occasional electric. Brendan O’Brien, veteran producer of many huge rock artists including Bruce Springsteen, Pearl Jam and Neil Young, was there to help things along – and knew exactly

how to manage his client’s insecurities, recalls Cornell. “A good producer will have a way of staying positive with no bullshit,” he says. “He’ll say, ‘Yeah, this song doesn’t work for me, but maybe if you try this...’, that kind of thing. I didn’t have that experience on this album: I just gave Brendan all my demos and he was very happy: we recorded them in the order that he prioritised, not me, and that was it.”

Cornell has been through some traumas in his time, not least an ultimately victorious battle with the demon booze which saw him emerge from rehab with renewed focus a decade and more ago. Is he a moody guy, we ask, and if so might that be affecting his uncertainty during the songwriting process? “It could be,” he replies evenly.

“I think that I’m to some degree a moody person, and I think that as brain chemistry changes, and moods change, then definitely my perspective on what I do changes. But

I also know that the outside perception of stuff that I do creatively also changes my perception of it, and that’s where bands help. When you don’t have that, and you’re in the early stages of demoing and playing music for people, I don’t necessarily trust their reaction. Who’s gonna say, ‘I don’t like it’? Very few people.”

Cornell has good reason for this caution.

Although his extensive back catalogue has been received with more or less widespread approval over the decades, as the small matter of 30 million album sales indicates, it hasn’t all been plain sailing. His 2009 album *Scream*, produced partly by R&B specialist Timbaland and pop youth Justin Timberlake among others, was roundly condemned as a failure by fans and critics. The damage was undone to an extent by 2011’s live acoustic covers album *Songbook*, but it’s little wonder that at points in *Higher Truth*’s creation, Cornell was uncertain of his own writing.

Anyway, never mind all that. For our purposes *Songbook* is obviously of more interest than *Scream*, largely because it’s all about the acoustic guitar. Which instruments has he been using lately, we ask? “I started using Martins in 2010 or 2011,” he replies. “They were doing an ad campaign where they take lyrics from artists’ songs and put them in the ad, which shows a guitar. I got an email about that, and I thought ‘Well, this

“I’m not a great guitar player. I’ve always been a songwriter first, not an instrumentalist”





is pretty great'. Because really, they were doing a paid advertisement for my song, the way I saw it. So of course I was happy to do it. I think it was 'Hunger Strike' [by Cornell's side project Temple Of The Dog] which had a line in the Martin ad, and they gave me a Clarence White D28 and a regular D28. Once I sat down with that D28, I was hooked on Martins. It was the first time I felt I was playing a nice instrument in my life, because I'm not a great guitar player and I never thought of myself as that: I've always been a songwriter overall first, as opposed to an instrumentalist. The Martins were a game-changer."

Is Cornell picky about using vintage acoustics only, or is he willing to dig into new ones too? "I think new ones sound great, if you choose the right ones," he observes. "I think you need to play 'em, though. The biggest difference is the settling-in. The first time I got a D28, and I had two of them sitting in a room, the one that sounded the best would be the one that I was playing the most. If I played one for two weeks, it would just start to get this really beautiful, woody sound. I'd switch to the other one and think, 'This other one isn't as good a guitar.'"

He goes on: "I don't know why this is – maybe you do? – but once they've been resonating for a while, it seems to change the tone and the feel, so I get why old ones sound so good. When I went in to record this new record, I had a parlour guitar and the D28, and Brendan had a long list of vintage Martins, and that's all we used, really. We used mixed electrics too, but otherwise, the whole record is Martins, apart from a Gibson acoustic that I used on something. I had a guy telling me that if you just put a guitar in a room where you're making music, and you let the speakers resonate, that will actually season it faster and make the tone better.

"I think humidity affects them: it can have a positive and negative effect. Too much humidity is definitely bad, and dramatic temperatures up and down are bad. But I've taken a couple of different Martins on airplanes 150 times, to every part of the world, and it doesn't seem to hurt them!"

Does Cornell play 12-string, we want to know? "I haven't really: I have one, but it's kind of annoying to me!" he chuckles. "They sound really great on a couple of things, but I remember when I was eight or nine and hearing acoustic 12-string a lot, and it always kind of annoyed me. That kind of 'Hotel California' sound! There's 12-string on this record on a couple of spots, actually: Brendan played it, and he knew where to put it in. You don't even know it's there, but it works, it sounds great."



Just for a bit of added zing? "Yeah, exactly – that sizzle that happens. I used to have a 12-string on the road because I was doing a couple of Zeppelin songs, one of which had a 12-string on it, but I like bending the strings and I have a clumsy left hand, so it didn't lend itself to a 12-string. Too many strings! Six is too many, really..."

It's funny, in a way, to consider Cornell, a man for whom rock always has a capital R (and grunge a capital G, we suppose), devoting his time to the acoustic tours that led to the *Songbook* album and now a slew of similar US dates, happening as you read this. It's even weirder to consider that the guy only took up the acoustic properly in relatively recent times.

"My first instrument was the piano, when I was about 10," he remembers. "I learned to read music and wrote some songs on piano, but I forgot all that. Then I wrote a couple of songs on acoustic guitar, kind of folky songs, because in the US at the time you'd hear a lot of Cat Stevens and John Denver, that kind of stuff, so I wrote a couple of three-chord songs when I was that age. But I abandoned it – and when I got back into songwriting it was mostly electric.

He adds: "Sure, if I had an acoustic guitar in the room, maybe I'd play it, or maybe I'd write a song on it, but it was mostly electric until the late 90s, when I started getting more into the notion of it."



How does Cornell approach his acoustic shows? Is his mindset different when he's walking on stage with a full band? "Well, there has to be an immediate connection or rapport with the audience, and that has to happen almost before you even play a song," he explains. "There's no formula to it, I think you just have to come out and do it. One thing that works for me is that I don't really have to follow a setlist. That helps, because it's really important to be able to read the room and know what song's going to be the best song to play next, or to play what somebody's asking to hear. That's the biggest difference – and the other thing is that you have to get over the fact that you're entirely

naked, and everyone can hear everything you do, including hitting a bad note."

More pressure, right? "Yeah, way more pressure!" he laughs. "But the interesting thing is that if you do a show this way, without taking yourself too seriously, the audience react to it. There's a guy up there who's not a superhero: it's just a guy playing songs. They get a better sense of who you really are. They see the emotions across your face, and you're doing it right in front of them. That can actually help, once you realise it – and you don't allow yourself to have a nervous breakdown!"

Higher Truth is out now on Universal.

Info: www.chriscornell.com.

CORNELL'S CAREER

Your cut-out-and-keep guide to Chris's trajectory so far

SOUNDGARDEN (1984-1998, 2010 TO DATE)

The legendary grungers made several ace albums in the 90s before getting fed up and splitting. They returned in 2010 and released an album, *King Animal*.

AUDIOSLAVE (2001-2007)

Ace, prolific rock/metal act that united Cornell with three members of Rage Against The Machine for a ferocious, Zeppelin-influenced sound laced with our man's astounding vocals.

CASINO ROYALE (2006)

Cornell sang the ravishing theme to Daniel Craig's first outing as James Bond, becoming the first American chap to do the honours.

His songs have also appeared on the soundtracks of *The Avengers*, *12 Years A Slave* and other 'tentpole' movies.

SOLO ALBUMS (1999 TO DATE)

Totalling three interesting albums, the sucky *Scream* with Timbaland in 2009, the tasty live acoustic *Songbook* two years later and now the rather enjoyable *Higher Truth*.

CHARITY (ONGOING)

The Chris and Vicky Cornell Foundation raises funds and partners with charitable organizations to mobilise support for children faced with homelessness, poverty, abuse and neglect.

Info: www.ifonly.com/celebrity/chris-cornell

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C.F. MARTIN & CO. DREADNOUGHT JUNIOR

There comes a time when you get a guitar and just know it has 'acoustic of the year' written all over it. This is such a time. It might be small but, oh my, it's perfectly formed – surely, we have a new category killer on our hands...

WORDS: STEVE HARVEY IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

It seems as though small is the new big in terms of acoustic guitars. I mean, just look at Ed Sheeran and his signature Martin models. We've also got the Swiftly signature edition Baby Taylor. Jake Bugg's picking up smaller guitars each time we see him play. Undoubtedly, though, Ed Sheeran's unstoppable popularity has catapulted the smaller bodied guitar into the consciousness of many people. How many of you thought he'd go on to headline Wembley Stadium with only a small-bodied Martin and a looper pedal – and, crucially, still have that stadium sound? Well he did. For three consecutive nights. Anyway, just as Ed's signature edition Martins have caused quite the stir, this new Dreadnought Junior is set to follow in those same footsteps. It does, however, have a fight on its hands.

Let's make no mistake about it, the Dreadnought Junior is stepping into the ring with the Taylor GS Mini, the reigning champ of the travel guitar market – but can the west coast be dethroned by the east coast?

The more affordable, entry-level X Series Martin guitars are made in Mexico as

opposed to their Nazareth factory to keep the costs down. As well as their origin, the X Series features HPL (high pressure laminate) for the back and sides material to keep the asking price reasonable. The Dreadnought Junior, although made in Mexico, is a bit more grown up in that it uses all-solid woods. It has a solid Sitka spruce top with solid sapele back and sides. As a comparison, the Taylor GS Mini series uses layered (or HPL, it's one and all) for the back and sides. Now, layered woods shouldn't scare you, but some of you will want the solid woods. If you're looking for an entry-level all-solid Martin dread, you'd be looking at a DRS2, their most affordable, full size dreadnought, which will set you back around £800. So where does the Dreadnought Junior sit in the Martin stable? Well, just between the LXM and the full size 14-fret dreadnought.

The Dreadnought Junior is reduced to 15/16ths of the full Martin 14-fret dreadnought dimensions. That works out at 360mm wide and 112mm deep – the full-size 14-fret dread measures in at 397mm and 124mm deep. The scale length on the Junior

is 610mm as opposed to the standard dread's 645mm. It feels like a grown up guitar – no corners have been cut and there are some impressive features here for the price.

Firstly, the Dreadnought Junior is equipped with the Fishman Sonitone pickup system as standard. Then there's the bound top edge of the body and the mortise and tenon neck join. We've also got a gig bag included in the £599 retail price. It even has the Martin logo and model designation laser etched into the heel block inside the guitar!

The Junior's top looks to be a lovely piece of spruce with a tight grain pattern set off perfectly against the faux tortoiseshell pickguard and the simple fine lines of the rosette. The sapele back and sides are quite a visual treat too and, sonically, close to that of mahogany – just a much more affordable substitute. We're seeing more and more guitars use sapele in construction (it's not a new thing, of course) but it's a fine piece of wood that you shouldn't turn your nose up at just because it doesn't begin with the letter M.

The bracing Martin has used on the Junior features solid Sitka spruce 1/4" struts in the



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Scale Length: 610mm

Onboard Electronics: Fishman Sonitone

Strings Fitted: Martin SP Lifespan 80/20 Bronze
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4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.

3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.

2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS:

www.martinguitar.com

www.westsidedistribution.com



X-bracing pattern – finely executed, too, without so much as a whiff of glue spill or untidiness. Really, this could’ve come from Nazareth and you’d not tell the difference. The only thing that suggests this guitar isn’t as “premium” as some other Martin models is the use of richlite for the fingerboard (rather than ebony or rosewood) and bridge. Richlite is an artificial product made from mixing paper with phenolic resin and trust us, it’s tough and will take a considerable amount of punishment. Martin’s neck wood designation for this guitar is “select hardwood” – but it looks to us like a one-piece mahogany or sapele affair. It’s a low profile neck, too, so it’s an absolute joy to play. Combine that with the size of the thing, and you’ve got an instrument you’ll hardly be able to put down. Crucially, atop the neck we have the full-



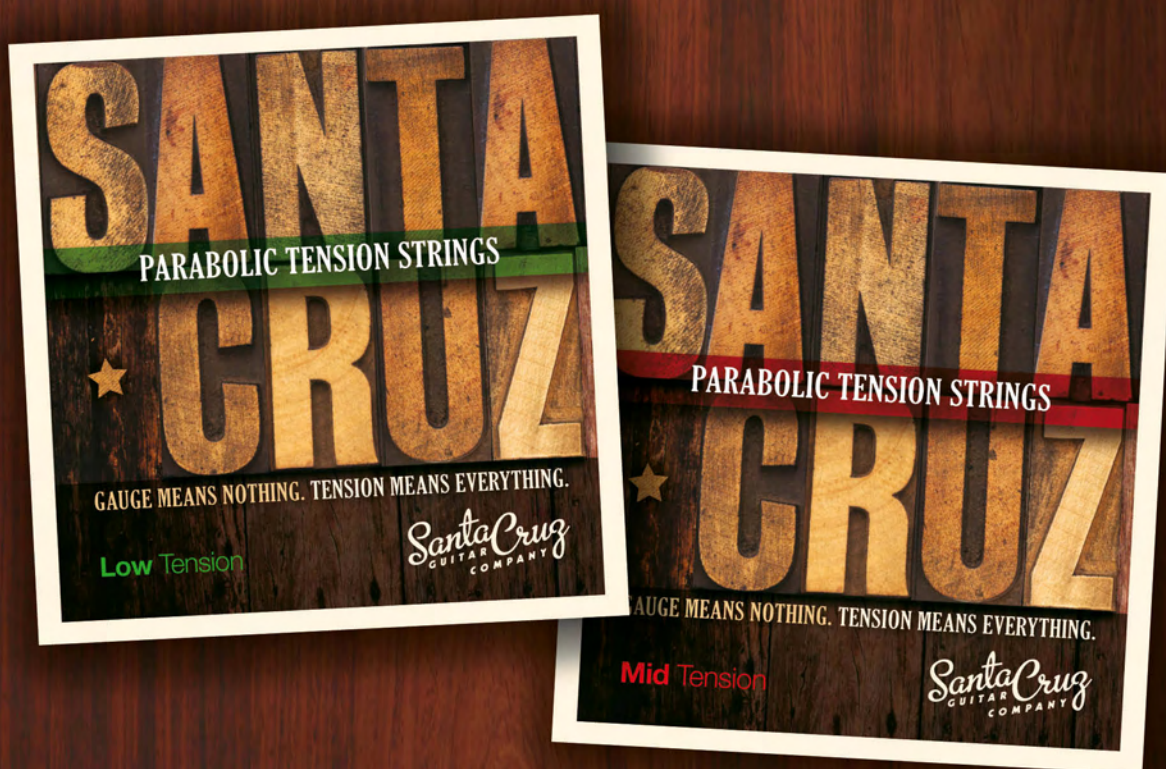
size C.F. Martin & Co. logo with the familiar Martin branded closed-back chrome tuners. We have the full-size nut width and string spacing too, so despite it being scaled down, the feel of the big boy dread is still there.

The Junior is finished in a hand-rubbed natural oil finish and while this isn’t as durable as a gloss or satin finish, it means that finishing and attention to detail (ergo sanding) has to be absolutely perfect – and it is. There are no rough edges on the fret ends, no untidy workmanship – whether you buy a £4k Martin or a £600 one, the quality of workmanship is of the same exacting high standards; you’re going to get a great guitar no matter where you enter the Martin family.

The Junior has bags of tone – way more than its body size would suggest – and it

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“The dynamic range is stunning – chord work to fingerstyle chops are ably catered for”

possesses an exceedingly useful palette of sounds. Whatever Martin does to get *that* Martin sound in Nazareth (you could buy a £15k custom model from some guy in his shop in Montreal but it just wouldn't have *that* thing Martins do), it's here on the Dreadnought Junior. That magic ingredient that makes us recognise a Martin's voice from one strum of a D chord is a truly special attribute and they've transferred that to the Junior. It's poised, confident and really expresses Martin's voicing in a smaller, traveller format. It has its own ready developed voice and executes its musicality with an authoritative edge. Everything we love about Martin's dreadnought sound is ready for the taking here. It is a travel guitar, sure, but it's also so much more than that. The sound is so striking, I'd not have a problem committing this to record. It is fuller and deeper than the body size would have you believe and it offers the low-end presence and clarity we've come to expect from Martin dreadnoughts. So what's the catch? Well that's just it. There isn't one. Yes, some may prefer fancier woods, but if you do you're not getting the essence of this guitar. You don't have to keep this one in its case with a humidifier, scared of the changing elements in case your AAA-grade moon-harvested spruce from some wild land cracks – hell, just pick the Junior up, sling the bag over your shoulder and get to the beach, the festival, the sofa, the open mic... wherever. It's so comfortable to play and with the voice of a bigger guitar – and I'll bet you it sounds just as good as that fancy pants guitar you spent your kids' inheritance on.

There's a punchy midrange on offer and its full of harmonically rich detail across the



board. A fingerstylist will have a lot of fun with this as it's responsive to the slightest of touches, yet some bluesy picker will dig in and unearth a raw appeal full of character and integrity with a drier sound when pushed – and that, we love.

For those after that dreadnought sound, without the cumbersome problems of a larger guitar if you're of a smaller stature, then this would be the ideal guitar for you. Or if you're not bothered about the slight size and just want to add this to your collection, be assured that its size doesn't mean it's of any littler worth – that scale length and string spacing will make it feel just like any of its larger stable mates. There's a compactness to the frets as you move up the board, but all the money is right there in the first five frets, right?



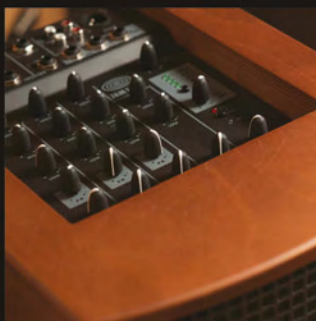
For the younger players who are serious about the instrument, it's a great point of entry into C.F. Martin & Co's heritage. Yet having said that, it's a guitar for whatever kind of player you are. They do say good things come in small packages, and that's certainly the case with this guitar. It's a fully capable, pro-level stage guitar thanks to the Fishman (neatly tucked away and out of sight) with a great variety of tonal assets built in – and it's so affordable it'd be daft to ignore it.

Travel guitars are in vogue at the moment and brands are throwing them around like they're going out of fashion, but now we have a new category killer in our midst. And this one I'd buy right away. I'm keeping my eyes peeled for a 'hog top Dreadnought Junior, too – just imagine that... ■

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KOSTAL OO

Around four years ago, Arizona luthier Jason Kostal set about creating an entirely new guitar, involving freshly devised methods of construction. That new guitar is a smaller bodied OO model and, as such, Kostal was faced with rewriting his rulebook. We got hold of the first one to hit the UK shores...

WORDS: STEPHEN BENNETT IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Around six years ago, Jason Kostal finally gave in. Prospective clients just wouldn't let it go. Never mind that with so much work on already it seemed like too big an undertaking – when was he going to start building a smaller model? The subsequent arrival of the Kostal OO hasn't shut them up. In fact, his customers can't seem to stop talking about it. That'll teach you, Jason.

Speaking from his desert fastness in Phoenix, Kostal insists he's always liked smaller bodied guitars but had (note the past tense) never been overly impressed with their tonal characteristics. He felt, for his own satisfaction at least, there might be the need for a total revamping of the building process. Hence, the "big ask"; an entirely new line, involving newly-devised methods of construction, for a bespoke builder with a waiting list longer than a Scandinavian art movie. He'd be faced with rewriting his own rulebook. Still, following three or four years of back-and-forth debate with co-conspirator, Michael Watts at TNAG – each brain-scrambling over what's already expected from a small guitar and what, furthermore, it might be capable of – Kostal eventually shifted the OO concept off the Arizona back-burner, in fully-realised form, over to the gentler pastures of Parsons Green.

There's a received wisdom, small-bodied guitar "given" that while such an instrument may well boast the requisite sparkling highs, that same plus will generally be off-set by the minus of a so-so mid-range and lower end. With his OO, Kostal has set out to achieve the more balanced sound capacity of a bigger, orchestra-size model. While he acknowledges going for something physically comfortable, here – easy to play both in terms of body size and in the relaxed string-tension afforded by a shorter scale-length – Kostal is determined



“Jason’s pretty much closed his order book (he’s been struggling to lift it) and the wait is now up to six years, so plenty of time to save up”

to maintain what he calls a “full-spectrum orchestral feel” that beefs up the sound with far more substantial mid and low-range levels.

The Kostal take on the OO tradition is a particular one in so far as it's not strictly “parlour” being probably too wide (at 14 ½” across the lower bout) to qualify. This might go some way towards explaining the sheer volume of the thing. Something must, as this is an incredibly loud instrument for its size. The bass is massive and the guitar breathes an endless sustain, even high up in the treble-sphere, that fools the ear into thinking it's suddenly grown amplification. That “something” (while it's clearly wicked sorcery in our book) Kostal ascribes to having created an entirely new build concept from the ground up. There was never any sense that this would be a modified version of an existing model; all previous thinking (no matter how practical or successful) went out of the window in the search for the specific sound he had swirling about, until now at least, only in his head.

He started out by modifying the body shape, designing a new bracing pattern, altering the radius for both top and back and increasing the soundhole diameter. The result is fingerstyle beauty with a clarity of tone that would be hard to match anywhere, at any price.

There's another oft-cited “certainty” that 14 frets to the neck is the way to get the best out of this body size but Kostal trashes that one from the off – not with this quality of build, material and (let's not argue) magic it isn't. An increased scale length might just bring an extra touch of warmth (Kostal's currently working on that one) but 12 frets to the neck seems both aesthetically and somehow, traditionally, more in keeping with the whole concept. Besides, on the technical side (if we must), the current design sees the bridge positioned right in the middle of the lower bout, bringing an extra touch of sweetness to all that raw power.



“With a body size that compromises neither volume nor tone, this really is a fingerstylist’s dream”

KOSTAL 00

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Kostal

Model: Kostal 00

Retail Price: £12,500

Body Size: 00

Made In: USA

Top: German spruce

Back and Sides: Wenge

Neck: Graphite reinforced mahogany

Fingerboard: Ebony

Frets: 18

Tuners: Gotoh 510

Nut Width: 1.75"

Scale Length: 24.75"

Onboard Electronics: No

Strings Fitted: USA-made

Gig Bag/Case Included: Hoffee hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Inventive, quality craftsmanship

Cons: A waiting list longer than your arm

Overall: A fingerstylist’s dream

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★★

Build Quality: ★★★★★

Value for Money: ★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless

4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat

3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well

2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor

CONTACT DETAILS:

The North American Guitar

www.thenorthamericanguitar.com



So, to the details. German spruce; smooth as a Caramac bar (and possibly more edible) atop the wenge back and sides that Kostal warmed to during his (sorcerer’s) apprenticeship under Ervin Somogyi; all straight grain and rich, glowing depth of colour. The carbon-fibre reinforced (Honduran mahogany) neck is of a burnished, glowing amber while the back-strip, binding, heel-cap, bridge and pins are all Stygian-depth ebony; plus, there’s a big fat bone saddle, scalloped bone nut and those ever-classy and reliable Gotoh 510 tuners in silver with ebony buttons.

Then we get to the really striking stuff which, cleverly, manages to stay within the elegantly simple parameters of Kostal’s overall brand design concept. With no fingerboard inlays beyond a creamy maple, almost Rennie Mackintosh-inspired, inlaid coachline,



the eye is drawn straight to the remarkable stained-glass-effect rosette (fashioned from maple burl, dyed and cut into ‘shards’ between ebony fills) that somehow captures the elusive, ethereal shimmer of diffused light through a medieval church window.

While the pronounced volute is something of a Kostal trademark, the squared-off, Spanish-style heel is another Somogyi-influenced touch, rounding off a neck that’s built, first, onto the body then carved afterwards over a big, chunky interior neck-block that doubtless helps those cognitively-dissonant sustain levels no end. The subtle, almost Nike-style, relief swoosh in the heel reflects that distinctive Kostal headstock ‘bite’ – a bold, scalloped-out chunk that adds an astringent splash of the modern to the conscious classicism elsewhere. Down at the



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“It will sigh and sing when coaxed, but equally have no trouble snapping and snarling if pushed”



other extremity, the delicately-panelled end-graft features inlaid pieces of Wenge and curly Honduran mahogany to match the neck.

All well and (more than) good, then, but it's the sound that counts, after all.

With a body size that, counter-intuitively, compromises neither volume nor tone, this really is a fingerstylist's dream. It plumbs the fathomless deep in open tunings (DADGAD may well be its natural home) with a smooth, even tonality that nonetheless packs a punchy (though never overwhelming) response that won't "max out" at high volume. It's that mysterious headroom thing again. Plus, there's a Steinway grand-piano clarity at the top end with not a weakly apologetic high C "plink" in sight. This OO will sigh and sing when coaxed, but equally have no trouble snapping and snarling if pushed. Hence,

working within the perceived "confines" of small body's three octaves is never going to be a problem.

The price? £12,500 when considering this pedigree – and its cost-range competition – is no huge amount. Really. It's cheaper than a "standard" Kostal model, after all, but then that's only if you can get one. As indicated earlier, Jason's pretty much closed his order book (he's been struggling to lift it) and the wait is now up to six years (although talk to TNAG about waiting times, as you could see yourself with a Kostal much before that wait time). So time to save up, perhaps, but (caveat emptor) the Kostal mark is currently so sought-after, especially in the US, that his prices could soon double.

That said, Kostal likes making new instruments for UK and European players

as he's been challenged to look beyond the familiar building materials (Brazilian rosewood, abalone and other proscribed, "traditional" staples) so as not to fall foul of ever-tightening export and endangered-species protection laws. We've always been more open to alternative tonewoods on this side of the Atlantic – you try to make the most of what's out there, after all – with luthiers like Lowden and Brook building with yew, sycamore, cherry and London lacewood for years. Hence, with necessity, as per cliché, proving the mother of invention, non-US players can now sample the Kostal wares in Wenge, Macassar ebony, Amazon rosewood and even that legendary Belize-born guitar source, "The Tree" (look it up!). If they're loaded, of course. And lucky. Or better still (where's that lottery ticket?) – both. ■



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APP EXTRA



FAITH PJE SIGNATURE FSG NC-BSY

If Patrick Eggle puts his name on a guitar, you expect a certain level of quality – and a certain price tag. That name now appears on the desirable Faith Signature range, including this striking sycamore and cedar model

WORDS: SAM WISE IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Patrick James Eggle is a man who likes to have his name on things. His original company was called Patrick Eggle, he has a current one called Patrick James Eggle, and when he designs guitars for Faith, his name ends up on the headstock of the most desirable ones. Faith, which has existed as a brand since 2002, relates to Eggle in the way that most of the American guitar manufacturers have sub-brands which manufacture abroad; Eggle and his team design the guitars in Shropshire, and they're built under their remit and supervision in Asia. The Signature series, produced in limited numbers each year, uses the fanciest and most unusual tonewoods that can be found, which this year includes bog oak, London plane tree, and as seen here, rippled sycamore.

We at Acoustic have always appreciated Faith for their willingness to mix up the tonewoods; they have, on occasion, given us the rare opportunity to sample an identical guitar body, with a spruce top and a range of back and side woods, which is very instructive when you want objective evidence about the effect of woods. Here, they've paired traditionally warm and rich toned cedar with sycamore, which apparently has characteristics in common with maple. This, on the back and sides, produces great



“The back of this Faith will have anyone who knows guitars interested”

projection and punch in a hard-edged tone, beyond even rosewood, which can risk being one-dimensional. That's an intriguing choice, and one we were keen to sample.

The top is fairly fine grained, though not as fine or as even as the top on the Acoustic Centre guitar we had in for review at the same time (which you can read the review of on page 60), despite a much higher price. The rippling of the sycamore on the back and sides is extremely attractive, giving a three dimensional appearance, which, in these days of photo flame finishes, is hard to credit as natural, even though it is. A simply shaped but stunningly patterned rosette of abalone will wow those who enjoy the shell, while the top and back are bound in ebony, with a bold centre stripe of the same wood adorning the back. The neck is mahogany, with a 20-fret ebony fingerboard, which lacks any fret markers except a mother of pearl F at the 12th (they're present on the fingerboard edge, so navigation isn't too compromised). The bridge and pins are ebony too, with a bone saddle matched by the same at the north end of the fingerboard, and Grover tuners, with what feel like real ebony buttons. From the front, it looks handsome and understated; but show off the back, and you'll have anyone who knows guitars interested and asking questions. Quality-wise, it needs to be good to live up to



“It punches hard, is focused and projects well without diminishing the richness of the cedar tone”

FAITH PJE SIGNATURE FSG NC-BSY

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Faith
Model: FSG NC-BSY
Retail Price: £1499
Body Size: Baby jumbo
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Solid cedar
Back and Sides: Solid sycamore
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Grover Rotomatic
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 645mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Strings Fitted: D'Addario
Gig Bag/Case Included: Faith hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Understated good looks, soft cedar tone underpinned by the punch of sycamore

Cons: Premium price for a Asian guitar, unconventional

Overall: Great value, even for the high price, and such a reward in return

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★★

Build Quality: ★★★★★

Value for Money: ★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.

4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.

3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.

2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

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“It is simply, for this reviewer’s taste, perhaps the most pleasing strummed tone I’ve ever heard”



the PJE signature, and it doesn't disappoint. The understated decoration is well executed, there are no shoddy details, and the soundhole emits a woody waft. Ultimately, though, it's those woods that make it feel luxurious.

This is a biggish guitar, but not obstructively so, and the slim C section neck has enough depth for even big hands to find a grip. Tonally, it's a fascinating. There was always a risk that the punch and directness of the sycamore would negate the complexity of the cedar, but the reverse has happened. Picking from high to low reveals that the classic harmonic richness of the high end is undiminished by the back and side woods; the treble has a pleasing blossom to it, and lacks the crisp, crystalline edge of spruce, just as it should. In the midrange, there's more punch to the tone than you might expect from mahogany and perhaps



a little less depth of tone. However, it's when you get to the bass that the revelation starts – it punches hard, is focused and projects well without diminishing the richness of the cedar tone. Start to dig in, and the bass, far from getting muddy or out of hand, tightens up and pushes the complexity of the rest of the tone hard; it's just a great sound. This guitar loved drop D, having not a hint of the floppiness that can afflict some guitars, and as we played with altered tunings – we longed for a heavier set of strings so we could try going down to C or even B – we felt confident that this guitar could hold its own. It is simply, for this reviewer's taste, perhaps the most pleasing strummed tone I've ever heard. There's no doubt the guitar could hold its own in a band (though with no pickup, this may not be its forte). However, there's such a lot to the tone that it begs to be heard



alone, and it will command a room as few other guitars will.

The price may seem high for an Asian-built guitar, but we got more excitement out of reviewing this than some of the high-end American-made brands that we have seen. It's not a luthier-built super customised racing guitar, but it's hard to point at a factory guitar that offers more, and the boldness of the choice of woods has truly reaped rewards here. If you're looking for an all round guitar, and have written off cedar as not retaining its shape well enough under hard strumming, you must try this. Indeed, unless you have played a cedar and sycamore or maple combination before, I would say try this regardless; it may be something you have not heard before, and you might just fall in love. We did. ■



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Phil Davidson is a well established and highly experienced luthier, Ashbury's Pete McClelland and Chris Rudd are also involved in the design process. All three are experienced mandolinists and frets players.

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APP EXTRA



ACOUSTIC CENTRE ACOUSTIC COLLECTION STADIUM

Some might find the heart-shaped soundhole preposterous – but not our reviewer, who finds himself enamoured of this characterful all-solid guitar

WORDS: SAM WISE IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

History is important in the guitar world, maybe even more so in the acoustic one. The Acoustic Centre has only been in existence since 1993 – so they can't exactly compete with C.F. Martin & Co. for historical significance – but their CV includes being instrumental in introducing Collings Guitars into the UK and, at one point, being the world's largest Lowden dealer.

Martin comparisons aside, when they took the decision to design their own line of all-solid guitars the Acoustic Centre certainly drew from history. They didn't do it in the conventional, staid way that most guitar makers do; they grabbed inspiration from various by-waters of Zematis-esque guitar history, forming a whole, which, for us at least, is extremely persuasive.

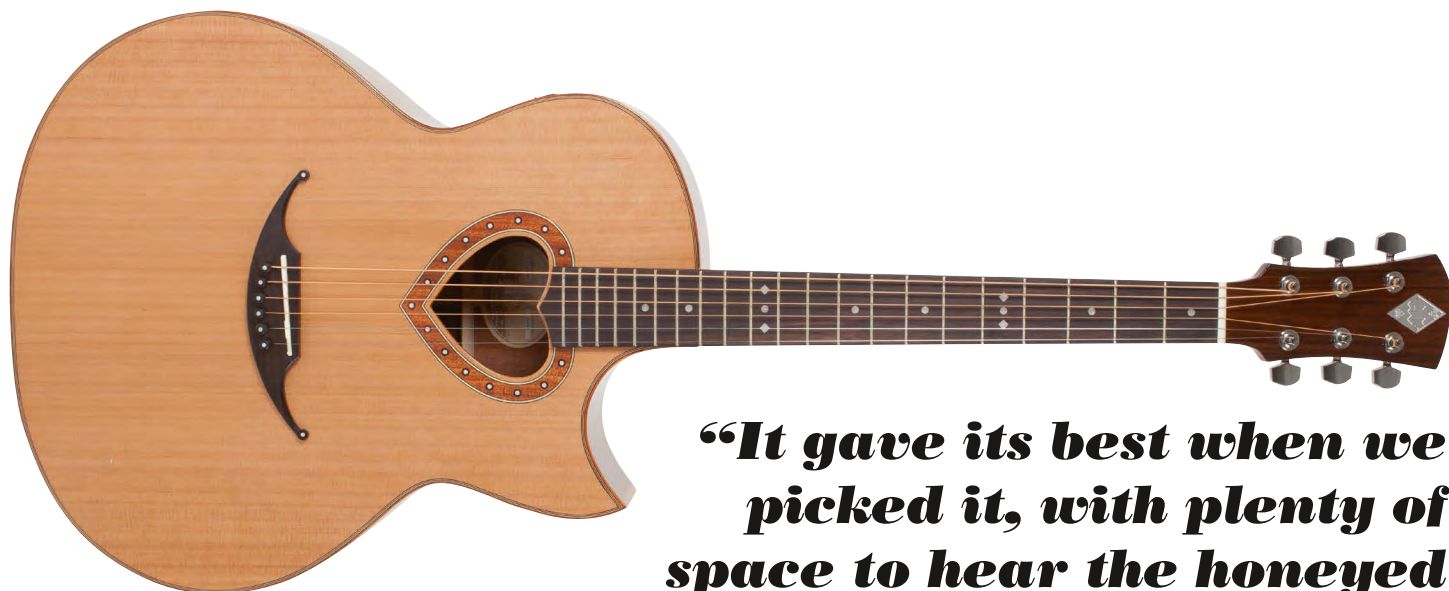
At just under £600 a go, these aren't the cheapest all-solid instruments on



the market; but, for this level of unique character, it's cheaper than its rivals' offerings.

The appearance of this guitar may well polarise opinion. Indeed, it did here: we were all at the "I love it" end of the spectrum. Those who prefer their guitars built to the highly conservative Martin style, however, may find it's not for them. The Western cedar top has a slightly red, honeyed tone to it, and is more finely grained than any cedar this reviewer has seen, with lots of cross-silking. This plays host to the guitar's most notable visual feature: the heart shaped soundhole, outlined (is it still a rosette when it's heart shaped?) in what appears to be mahogany, ebony and spruce.

The Acoustic Centre website describes this as art deco, but while we're not seeing that, it's a very pleasant effect. Back and sides are of rich, striped mahogany, bound in slightly



“It gave its best when we picked it, with plenty of space to hear the honeyed sweetness of those harmonics”

ACOUSTIC CENTRE ACOUSTIC COLLECTION STADIUM

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Acoustic Centre

Model: Acoustic Collection Stadium

Retail Price: £595

Body Size: Jumbo

Made In: China

Top: Solid cedar

Back and Sides: Solid mahogany

Fingerboard: Ebony

Frets: 21

Tuners: Closed gear chrome

Nut Width: 1 11/16"

Scale Length: 22.5"

Onboard Electronics: Fishman

Strings Fitted: Acoustic Centre Elites Phosphor Bronze

Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Gorgeous, sounds great, do we need more pros?

Cons: Looks might not appeal to some

Overall: Fantastic, particularly if you like rich fingerstyle tone and unique styling

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★★

Build Quality: ★★★★★

Value for Money: ★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.

4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.

3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.

2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Acoustic Centre

www.acousticcentre.co.uk



paler-stained mahogany, with a lovely central stripe of crosshatched purfling. The ebony bridge is a smile like shape that the Acoustic Centre say is an 18th century lyre-shaped bridge, and it certainly suits the style of the instrument, carrying ebony bridge pins and a compensated saddle which, though the material is unspecified, looks to be good quality plastic.

The mahogany neck has a 21-fret ebony fingerboard with dots-and-diamonds position markers, and is topped with an understated headstock wearing unbranded but perfectly functional closed back tuners.

The final touch is a metal diamond with an 'AC' Acoustic Collection logo, which is a little incongruous, and looks as though maybe the DC has fallen off somewhere. That's picky, however, on a stunning (to our

eyes at least) guitar whose look, even when you're playing and can't see the full outline of the soundhole, is unmistakably different. The construction is hard to fault as well; the inlay and binding are executed to perfection and the frets are beautifully sanded with no hint of corner cutting.

Nobody is likely to complain, either, about a Fishman piezo pickup and Ink4 head unit, which, while short on fancy features (it features volume, three-band EQ, Brilliance control and a tuner) makes up for it by being elegantly understated: the black on black flat controls, while illuminated by LEDs to show position when in use, are otherwise almost invisible.

All of this is moot, however, unless it sounds good. Despite being described as 'jumbo sized', the relatively slim-



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“The looks won’t please some people – but then some people didn’t think Marilyn Monroe was a looker”



waisted, though deep bodied Stadium is more welcoming than our comparator dreadnought, and while we would have preferred a vintage V profile to the neck, its D section provides enough meat even for those with big hands.

Tonally, cedar and mahogany ought to be rich and expressive, with a powerful midrange and lots of harmonic complexity, and that’s exactly what we’re getting here. Here and there while reviewing this, we’ve taken issue with the Acoustic Centre’s descriptions, and we’re going to do so again: they describe this guitar as being designed as a platform for the ‘big strum’, and it does meet their description in that regard, but for God’s sake, pickers, try this out too.

For us, it was massively versatile, but it gave its best when we picked it, with plenty



of space to hear the honeyed sweetness of those harmonics blossom and tumble. Tuned to open D, it sounded huge, rolling great waves of complexity over spacious arpeggios in a way we found irresistible, and which led us to experiment with new tunings and chord voicings; always a plus in a guitar.

Strummed, it does indeed have a big, full, rich sound, but really open up on it, and you’ll find the tone doesn’t retain quite the crisp clarity that a spruce and rosewood combination would.

In no way should this sound like a criticism; you can strum on this guitar to your heart’s content and never be unsatisfied, and make no mistake, it’s pretty loud; it’s only that the obnoxious levels of punch that you can get from the aforementioned alternative is even greater.



For us, we’ll take this every day. The warmth and depth of tone are worth more than the extra punch and clarity ever could be.

Plug it in, and it’s a similar story; the InK4 is easy to use, and if you do want a bit top end cut, the EQ and the brilliance controls deliver.

We loved it. It’s really as simple as that; the looks probably won’t please everyone (some people don’t think Marilyn Monroe was much of a looker), but they work for us, and they can’t be called ‘identikit’.

Tonally, it’s an undisputed cracker, and it’s more than a match for most styles – and believe us, we tried a few – with tremendously winning warmth. For the price, it’s an absolute bargain, and frankly, we’re tempted to place an order. If that won’t convince you, we don’t know what will.

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APP EXTRA



TERRY PACK DBS

*Alun Lower checks out a flashy new dreadnought
with good looks and a reasonable price tag*

WORDS: ALUN LOWER IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

I can't think of any acoustic guitar lover that hasn't whittled away a lunch break (or two) fawning over ridiculous, avant-garde guitar designs on some boutique guitar shop's website. We've all done it, let's be honest. Now imagine if you saw a guitar with those lovely lines, exotic tonewoods and quirks, but for less than a grand. That's exactly what Terry Pack Guitars is trying to offer with its range of flashy-yet-reasonable six-stringers, and the latest model to join the ranks is a thundering, red-blooded dreadnought aiming itself squarely at the last few months of your savings. I'll say it now – this is the 'Borg' of the guitar world. Try as you might, with the DBS, resistance is most definitely futile. Let's begin!

I'll preface this section with a rare glimpse into the life of a review guitar. When I first took the hardcase out of its cardboard enclosure and opened it up, I was filled with all the regular delight and enthusiasm you'd expect when confronted with a rather fancy looking new guitar. Clasping my grubby mitts around the neck within seconds and having a first out-of-tune strum, I turned to the headstock and saw what I thought was some powder covering the surface. Blowing it away, I was then horrified to discover that a hygrometer built in to the hardcase itself had come loose, shattering all over the guitar and spraying tiny shards and chunks of glass into every corner of the case. Miraculously, the guitar itself had managed to avoid any damage. However, this story leads me to the point that if you're going to buy a lovely guitar like this and intend to take the included hardcase further than the next room: please, please invest in something more durable. Your guitar will thank you for it!

Minor drama over, there's also the matter of the DBS itself – and my, what a handsome



“It yields an articulate, almost airy quality, in addition to the usual thump and volume of a dreadnought”

guitar it is. Now, I'm normally a fan of minimalism and restraint with guitars, usually reacting to abalone as if it would bring me out in hives. But most of the embellishments on this guitar are really rather nice, and I think it's only fair I go into them in a little more detail.

From the pictures you would probably think we're dealing with a fairly simple Sitka spruce and flamed-maple combo in terms of the tonewoods. However, in actual fact the back and sides are constructed from a wood apparently known as bang lang – which is a new one to me as well. I'll go into the tones later but purely on a visual level it's striking and eye catching, and somehow a bit less irksome than flamed maple in my eyes. Everything sits together nicely and it's broken up by the lovely padauk and herringbone binding running its way around the body.

Then of course we have our first quirk: the armrest. Normally a feature reserved for decidedly more upmarket custom guitars, this not only looks striking but feels great to play on. I've often avoided dreadnoughts and jumbos purely from a comfort perspective in the past, but this subtle carve makes a substantial difference to playability. It's very encouraging that Terry Pack has brought this feature to such a keen price point – who knows, maybe one day we'll be seeing it on budget instruments as well.

Elsewhere on the body there's a herringbone rosette around the sound-hole and an ebony bridge dotted with abalone versions of the Terry Pack logo. Of all the decorations this is probably the only one I would personally disapprove of – but really that's being overly particular. A one-piece mahogany neck joins the body very neatly, and is topped by a lovely dark ebony fingerboard inlaid tastefully with wooden maple leaf inlays. They add some visual



“If you’re after a dreadnought with a difference, the DBS simply has to be on your shortlist”

TERRY PACK DBS

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Terry Pack

Model: DBS

Retail Price: £1,195

Body Size: Dreadnought

Made In: Vietnam

Top: Solid Sitka spruce

Back and Sides: Solid bang lang

Neck: Mahogany

Fingerboard: Ebony

Frets: 20

Tuners: Gotoh 301

Nut Width: 45mm

Scale Length: 645mm

Onboard Electronics: No

Strings Fitted: D’Addario

Gig Bag/Case Included: ‘Lizardskin’ hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Lots of unexpected qualities for the price; versatile sound from the unusual tonewoods

Cons: Lack of electronics

Overall: A dreadnought with a difference, and an interesting and unusual tonal palette

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★★

Build Quality: ★★★★★

Value for Money: ★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.

4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.

3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.

2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Terry Pack Guitars

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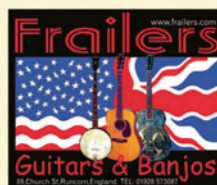
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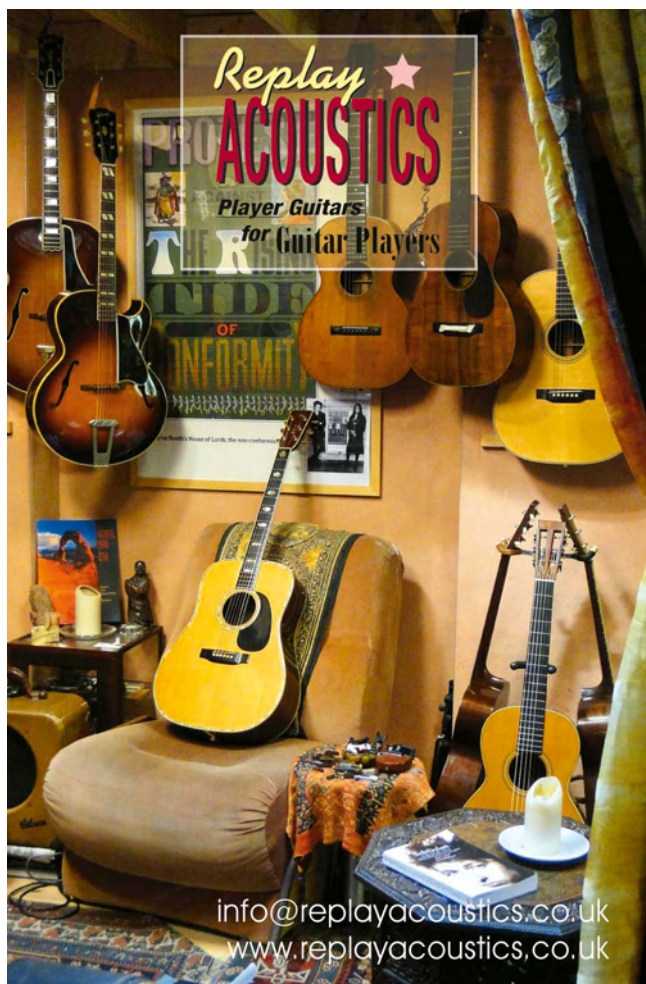
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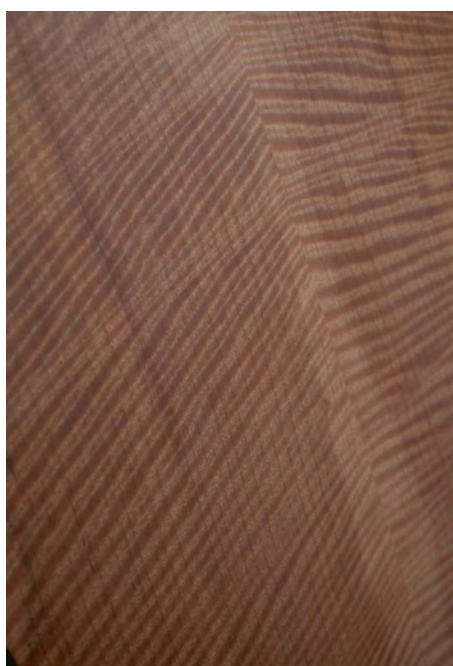
“I’m frankly astonished how much I enjoyed my time with the Terry Pack DBS”



interest without being gaudy or pretentious. The headstock too is nicely styled, and a rosewood veneer and subtle Terry Pack logo are the only adornments (not counting the gold tuners anyway). Thankfully, these have been partnered with black machineheads to lessen the effect.

All in all it's a wonderful guitar from a visual and build-quality perspective. All the work appears to be of exemplary quality, with tidy finishing and carefully considered visual flourishes. There's no denying that the DBS paints a most desirable picture – but of course that's only half the story.

Thankfully, the DBS' merits extend far further than its striking visual appearance, putting in a masterful tonal performance that again stands up well to similarly and higher priced guitars.



A first strum yields an articulate, almost airy quality in addition to the usual thump and volume of a dreadnought. It's a quality that responds beautifully to different playstyles – fingerstyle is a joy on this guitar and it really does have the potential to fit in with just about any style of music. I'm not sure exactly whether I'd prefer bang lang to more mainstream tonewoods, but it certainly has a refreshing character that isn't nearly as harsh to my ears as a guitar made from flamed maple, which I would normally avoid. It's not as middy and focused as mahogany, but also doesn't sound quite as dark as rosewood. It's somewhere in between and an awful lot of fun to play with.

All of the requisite volume and projection you would expect from a good quality dread is also present and correct. In truth, the only negative I can really highlight is the lack of a plugged-in



option. To complete the package it would have been nice to have a basic pickup/preamp combo pre-installed, but of course it's perfectly possible to mic up or install your own preferred option.

Given that the idea of a flashy dreadnought with a flamed wood back and sides normally repulses me like little else, I'm frankly astonished how much I enjoyed my time with the Terry Pack DBS. It's a wonderful instrument at a competitive price point that deserves to carve its own space in the market and give the big boys something to sweat over. The lack of electronic options aside, you get an awful lot for your money here. Not least of which is the infectious combo of smart and comfort-focused design with a genuinely interesting and unusual tonal palette. If you're after a dreadnought with a difference, the DBS simply has to be on your shortlist. ■



Artist: Jamie O'Gorman - Scouting for Girls

Photo Courtesy of: Ben Gibson Photo.com



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13643 - Chana CK23 Concert Ukulele
8520 - Chana CK35CE Electro Concert Ukulele
8519 - Chana CK35GS Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
12603 - Chana CK38 Concert Ukulele
8513 - Chana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
8512 - Chana CK50WG Concert Ukulele
13627 - Chana CK51SE Slimline Concert Ukulele
8508 - Chana PK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
8516 - Chana PK25S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
13637 - Chana SK10GN Soprano Uke, Matte Green
4712 - Chana SK10S Soprano Ukulele
13636 - Chana SK10YW Soprano Uke, Matte Yellow
13644 - Chana SK12 Soprano Ukulele
14507 - Chana SK14 Ukulele Mahogany Soprano
4711 - Chana SK20S Soprano Ukulele Uke
14210 - Chana SK21M Premium Mahogany Soprano
13626 - Chana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
8517 - Chana SK22Z Sop Ukulele Zebrawood B&S
13642 - Chana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Chana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
4715 - Chana SK35S Solid Mahogany Gloss
9052 - Chana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
14211 - Chana SK70BA Spruce & Morinda Sop Uke
14508 - Chana SK70L Soprano Ukulele
7108 - Chana SK70WG Soprano Ukulele
14212 - Chana SK70WG Soprano Uke, Willow B & S
7106 - Chana SK75 Soprano Ukulele
7107 - Chana SK75R Soprano Ukulele
12608 - Chana SKS15E Sim Electro Soprano Uke
4708 - Chana TK10 Tenor Ukulele
4465 - Chana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
14209 - Chana TK22Z Spruce & Zebrawood Tenor Uke
14208 - Chana TK35-10 Tiple 10 String Tenor
12611 - Chana TK38 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Chana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Chana Concert Uke Gig Bag
13312 - Chana Tenor Uke Gig Bag
13310 - Chana Baritone Uke Gig Bag
5009 - Ozark Ukulele Banjo
14544 - RISA LP Tenor Ukulele Cherry Sunburst
12522 - Recording King RU98R Resonator Ukulele
6770 - Marshall AS1000 - 50W+50W, 2x8"
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
9639 - Stagg USX SPA Soprano Uke Spalted Maple
12189 - Uluru Koa II Tenor Ukulele
10424 - Uluru Luhua I Soprano Ukulele
10425 - Uluru II Concert Ukulele
10433 - Uluru Pukana LA IIC Cutaway Concert Uke

12 Strings



13865 - Breedlove Pursuit 12 String Acoustic
13907 - Cort Earth 7012ENS Electro 12-String
12227 - Eko 12 String Guitar, Secondhand
14502 - Eko Ranger XII VR Natural, 12 String
13553 - Eko Vintage Ranger 12 in Black
14525 - Guild JF230-AB USA-Made c1997
9553 - Lag T200D12 12 String Acoustic Guitar
9816 - RainSong JMS000 Classic Series Electro
9817 - RainSong WS3000 Classic Series Electro
14256 - Takamine GD30 12 String, Black
13475 - Tanglewood TW145 12 SS CE
14398 - Vintage VE2000GG12 Giltrap 12-String
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB 12 Paul Brett
14350 - Vintage VE8000PB12 Paul Brett
12706 - Washburn D42S 12 12 String Guitar

Mandolin Family



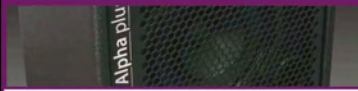
8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
8824 - Ashbury AM-370 Mandolin
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
14198 - Breedlove Crossover Mandolin OO VS, Bk
14028 - Breedlove Crossover OO O Hole, Black
14500 - Breedlove Crossover Mandolin, VV
12568 - Fender FM63S Acoustic Mandolin, Sunburst
12540 - Fender FM63SE Electro Acoustic Mandolin
4551 - Jimmy Moon A Plus E Electro, Natural
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon A Plus Electro Bouzouki, Nat
4563 - Jimmy Moon Octave Mandolin (Mandola) Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
9430 - Ozark Flat Back Bouzouki
7221 - Savannah SA115 Electro Mandolin, Used
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst
8316 - Westcoast M50E Electro Mandolin

Travel Guitars



13848 - Eko Tri Mini Honey Burst 3/4 Acoustic
14472 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
0000 - Martin - 6 Models in Stock Now
14264 - Takamine GX11ME NS
9588 - Tanglewood TW15 Baby All Solid Travel
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar
14437 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini, Dark Red Burst
14439 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Bk
14436 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Nat
14438 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini, Old Violin Sunburst
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel

Acoustic Amplification



0000 - AER - 14 Models in Stock Now
0000 - Acus One - 11 Models in Stock Now
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
8166 - Fender Acoustasonic 150 Acoustic Combo
9166 - Loudbox Artist
4548 - Fishman Loudbox Mini - 60W, 1x6.5"
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220W, 6x4"
9711 - Laney LA12C Acoustic Amp Combo
13282 - Markbass AC101 Acoustic Combo
6770 - Marshall AS1000 - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS500 - 50W, 2x8"
6771 - Marshall AS500 - 50W, 2x8"
4573 - Peavey Ecoustic E20 - 20W, 1x8"
4572 - Peavey Ecoustic E208 - 20W, 2x8"
0000 - Roland - 7 Models in Stock Now
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
13018 - Tanglewood T3 30W Acoustic Amplifier
8108 - Tanglewood T6 60W
13471 - Tanglewood TFS Bass Sub
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

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APP EXTRA



LEVINSON

LD-35

*Levinson's new lease of life in the UK comes from a newly formed company to distribute Swiss-based luthier Gary Levinson's work – **Acoustic** gets hold of the LD-35 to put it through its paces...*

WORDS: STEVE HARVEY IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Gary Levinson, based in Allschwill, Switzerland, has enjoyed a long association with guitar building over the past few decades. Many will remember him primarily from his association with Blade electric guitars, but he has been involved with building and repairing acoustics since the late 1960s. The current ranges are named after rivers in the US. The LD-35 is from the Missouri series and are, according to Levinson's website: "big, bold, beautiful instruments that redefine the powerful sound of this genre of guitars with amazing tonal balance and rapid response to all playing styles unlike anything you've played before."

Although Levinson's acoustic range is relatively new, it has effectively been over 40 years in the making as Gary built and repaired acoustic guitars during the mid '60s and early '70s in his native Illinois.

A small amount of guitars were handmade from his workshop in Basel in Switzerland to fund his studies at university there in the late '70s prior to the success of the Levinson Blade electric guitars, so what we've got here is the culmination of 40 years plus experience of new designs and techniques implemented in the acoustic collection.

The range of Levinson acoustic guitars include parlour, dreadnought, cutaway, and slope-shouldered body shapes; the LD-35 clearly a nod toward classic dreadnought looks and feel measuring in at approximately 394mm at the lower bout. Designed by Gary in Switzerland, the Levinson acoustics are then made in China and pass through two rigorous quality control points in both the aforementioned Swiss city of Allschwill and the UK. Clearly, this is something worth investing in if you're a guitar maker



“Although Levinson’s acoustic range is relatively new, it has effectively been over 40 years in the making”

because the LD-35 is immediately playable with a perfectly set up action and useable tone straight from the box. There's no case included with the acoustics, unfortunately, and it's something that's a bit of a frustration because almost all other guitar makers in the competitive £1,000 or thereabouts arena will offer a case with a guitar. And there's nothing worse than pulling a poly bag off your guitar before you play it, but maybe that's just me...

Anyway, we've confirmed that the quality control checks work in terms of playability, but what about construction? Well, it's nicely put together, for sure. There are some glue spills if you shine a light into the soundhole, but those, while a little unsightly, aren't going to change a thing regarding the tone.

The LD-35 has all-solid construction boasting a Sitka spruce top and ovankol back and sides. The spruce is a fine looking piece of nicely bookmatched wood with a good amount of feathering crisscrossing the grain – and it has been voiced by Levinson for optimal tonal response. Voicing and tap tuning are seen as two elements that contribute to the difference between a good guitar and a great one.

Fancy wood, a high gloss finish, and lots of abalone inlay are aesthetically pleasing but have nothing to do with making a great sounding guitar.

In a nutshell, voicing is the process of building a guitar using carefully made decisions and techniques with the goal of shaping the tone in a specific direction and to get a certain stiffness along the grain and across it. The top's thickness varies in specific areas, allowing it to vibrate more freely, but still maintaining enough mass to not lose its full, rich tone and ability to move the air more quickly.



“This guitar is the culmination of 40 years’ experience of new designs and techniques”

LEVINSON LD-35

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Levinson

Model: LD-35

Retail Price: £995

Body Size: Dreadnought

Made In: China

Top: Sitka spruce

Back and Sides: Ovangkol

Neck: Mahogany

Fingerboard: East Indian rosewood

Frets: 20

Tuners: Chrome 16:1 die-cast

Nut Width: 43mm

Scale Length: 650mm

Onboard Electronics: LR Baggs Element

Strings Fitted: USA-made

Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: A handmade feel from Gary Levinson emanates from this despite being made in China; great quality control, and a guitar with a distinctive character

Cons: No bag or case with this is a bit of a put-off when standing in the shop faced with competition offering a hard case; strings on the review model were poor but just swap them for some you trust

Overall: A well-made stage ready dreadnought that’s ready to tackle whatever styles you throw at it

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★★

Build Quality: ★★★★★

Value for Money: ★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless

4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat

3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well

2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor

CONTACT DETAILS:

Levinson Guitars

www.levinsonguitars.com

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There’s ivory binding on the top and back edge of the spruce, its creamy hue looking particularly elegant against the dark ovangkol of the back and sides. There’s a vintage looking scratch plate sitting on the top, too, and while I’m not a big fan of it (I’d go without a scratch plate altogether), it’s in keeping with the vintage styling of this dreadnought. There’s a set of open-geared butter bean tuners that complete that vibe, too. The headstock carries the ivory binding and has the flying fish Levinson logo which is a pretty thing indeed, echoing the smooth curves of the headstock’s profile.

The ovangkol back and sides are nicely bookmatched with an attractive centre stripe running down the back of the guitar that Levinson calls ‘vintage checkerboard’.

“If you love the warmth of mahogany for fingerpicking styles but don’t want to sacrifice



the full bodied sound of rosewood, ovangkol is for you,” Gary tells us. “I started using ovangkol around 1980 and it has a warm balance and a softer attack than rosewood, but it has more bite and brilliance than you can expect from mahogany back and sides.”

On to the neck and this looks to be a single piece of wildly grained mahogany with a contemporary low C profile, as opposed to the chunkier vintage V option. The heel cap is ivory, to match the body binding, and bears a strap peg. The LD-35 also comes equipped with an L.R. Baggs active Element system onboard to take you to the stage. The Element system is pretty unobtrusive, with just a single wheel tucked away in the soundhole and the battery pack at the heel block.

Heading back toward the body, there’s a bone nut sitting atop the East Indian rosewood





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“Its easily controllable, stage-ready personality is a real selling point”



fingerboard that bears pearloid dots in the accustomed locations. Rounding off the construction details, the bridge is Indian rosewood with a compensated bone saddle.

A common complaint about dreadnoughts is that they tend to be slightly too big for me some people, but the LD-35 is very nicely balanced and comfortable to sit and play. In the past I've played dreads that are either top or body heavy, but this is easily balanced on the knee.

Before we wax lyrical about the tonal quality of the LD-35, we'll say this: change the darn strings. The strings this guitar was equipped with were completely lifeless and swapping them out for a new set (Santa Cruz Guitar Company parabolic tension strings) really gave this guitar a whole new lease of life in the sonic department.

The LD-35 is everything you would expect from a dreadnought. Chords are full and rich,



although there isn't quite the monster bass you can achieve from some other dreads; but when that can be offset by the fact that the overall output is wonderfully balanced, then I think it's a decent trade. It's a brand new guitar, of course, and that hint of youthfulness to the voice will mellow out with age and round off the tone nicely, making this Levinson a solid investment for the future.

There's a good deal of natural sustain and sweet response in the guitar's tone; its snappy when flatpicked and its tonal balance, whether in standard tuning or dropped to an open variation, is strong and punchy without losing any definition. It doesn't move into boomy dread territory either and the balance of volume and tone really is excellent.

Priced at just over £1,000, the LD-35 faces tough competition from the likes of Martin,



Faith, Breedlove and Yamaha to name a few, and without a case included in the price it might lose out to some of its rivals. On tonal values alone, this is an absolute steal of a guitar. It's wonderfully balanced voice whether strummed or picked is a real winner in terms of versatility and usability.

You'll see Levinson guitars in the hands of the folks in 10CC and Mike Williams (Take That, Gary Barlow musical director), the latter using it on all live outings. Its easily controllable, stage-ready personality is another selling point – just change the strings before you take it to its first gig. You're unlikely to find too many stage-ready dreads sounding this good for the same money, but it would be nice to see a case or gig bag included in the price. It's a good-looking guitar with, crucially, a character that sets it out against others hanging on the shop wall. ■

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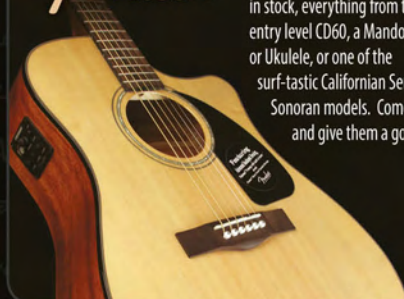
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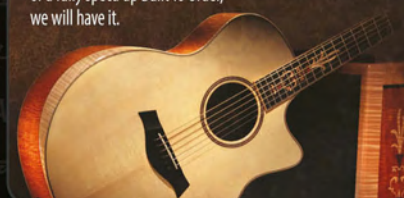
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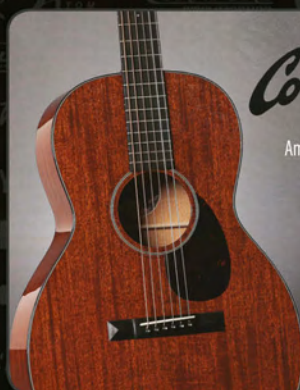
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SANTA CRUZ PARABOLIC TENSION STRINGS

Can a fancy set of strings really transform your bog standard guitar? We test out SCGC's new range, a decade in the making

WORDS: STEVE HARVEY IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

The Santa Cruz Guitar Company has, since this year's Summer NAMM Show, had an excellent couple of months. Firstly, they announced they'd signed one of the biggest country stars on the planet, Brad Paisley, to their roster of artists, subsequently releasing the Paisley signature acoustic. Fresh off the back of this, they've announced their brand new string range: Santa Cruz Parabolic Tension Strings.

I'll admit it: I had no idea what the hell parabolic tension meant within the context of guitar strings. What I did get, though, was the passion for seeking a string range to ably complement the complexity of overtones and sustain that SCGC achieves with their guitars by tap tuning and hand voicing each soundboard. Why go through all that effort in the first stages and finish it with something that you'd believe to not represent your tone the way you want it represented? If it's not right, and there's nothing out there to fix it, make your own. That's what SCGC did, although not on a whim – the new string range has been a decade in the making.

SCGC sought out the wisdom of Roger Siminoff from Straight Up Strings who, along with Richard Hoover, was tasked with creating a new design to full drive the complexity of tone offered by Santa Cruz guitars. They believe that when it comes down to strings, the key determiner is the tension of them, rather than the gauge. The gauge is simply the measurement of the string's diameter, while the tension of the string will determine its relative volume to other strings – or the EQ.

"String tension is determined by its core to wrap ration, which can vary greatly among manufacturers. This can create differences

between brands and an illogical EQ within any given set," says SCGC.

So, with that in mind, the parabolic tension range puts the exact tension on each string to create an appropriate download pressure that determines the volume between strings – or EQ – for your guitar.

"The strings require precise core to wrap ratios and precision fit and finish for tolerances of one half of one thousandths of an inch. This determines the tension/volume of each string to the exact EQ that your guitar was designed for. State of the art metallurgy and micro-coating assures long life by preventing corrosive moisture from contacting the core of these nickel- and lead-free strings."

With the string theory out of the way, you just want to know one thing: will they make a difference to the tone of my guitar? We put a set of Santa Cruz Parabolic Tension Strings mid tension (they're available in low and mid tension) on a Gary Levinson LD-35 dreadnought that, with its original strings, sounded a bit dull and lifeless with no complex harmonics or overtones when picked or strummed. Now the guitar itself is wonderful (we've had a few Levinson acoustics pass through the office), so it was a bit of a let down that this one

didn't sound quite as good as the others did. In a serendipitous turn of events, the Santa Cruz strings landed from California, ready to be tested on the right guitar – and we had it!

Something certainly happens when you restrung with SCGC strings. The Levinson changed its tone (both metaphorically and literally!) within the three minutes it took us to swap out the strings. It became lively and excited – as it had been waiting for these strings since leaving China. The tone became deep and resonant, rich with harmonic detail and the sustain that the Levinson was previously lacking abounded. A powerful, pronounced and tight bottom end with a piano-like clarity was complemented by a wonderfully shimmering top end with sparking, sweet trebles. Rich, warm mids padded out a bold voice for singer-songwriters, while the aforementioned

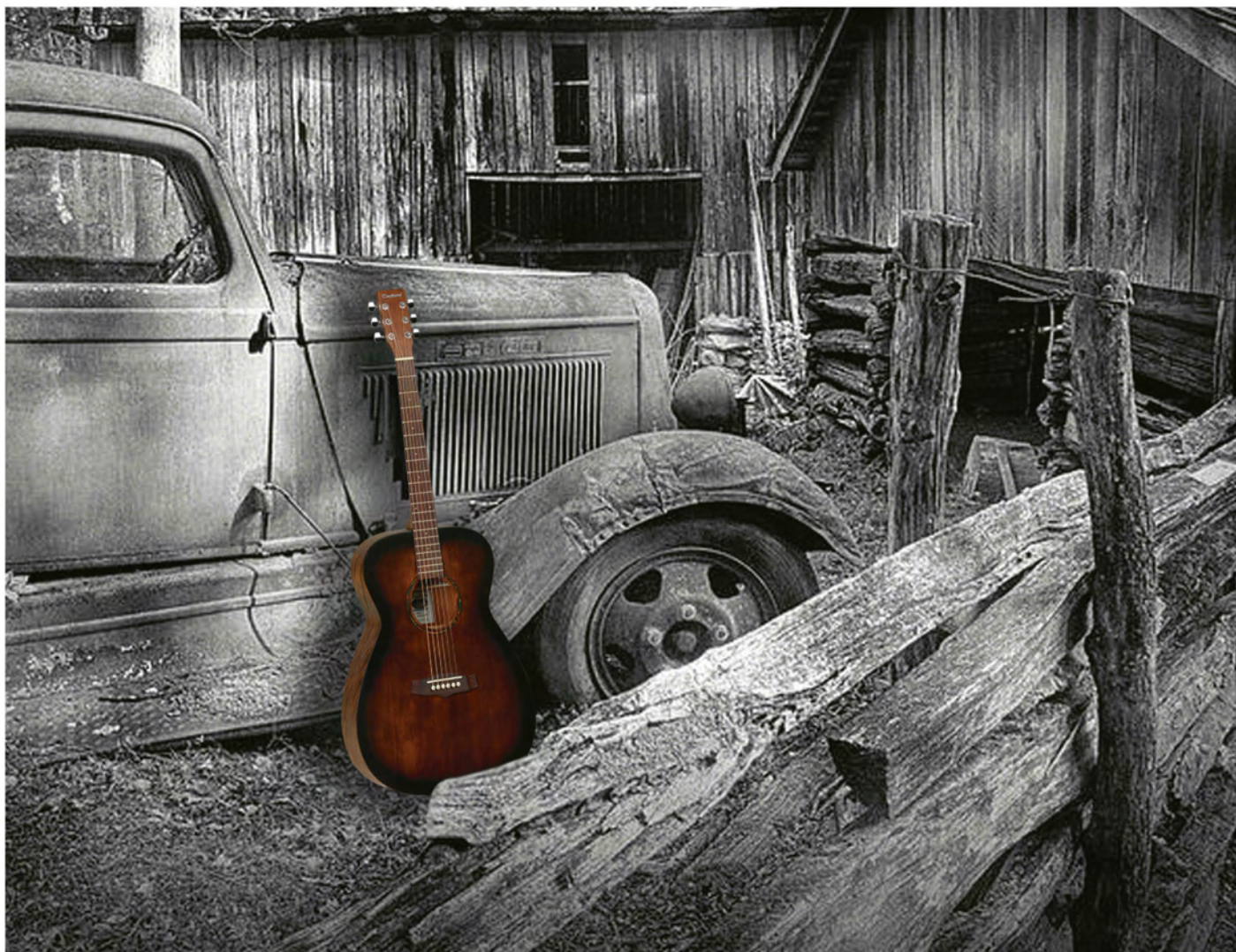
attributes would be ideal for a fingerstylist looking for that pronounced edge.

If they sound *this* good on a £1,000 Chinese-made guitar, just image what they'll sound like on your custom build. Yeah, go on. Get them ordered. They'll change the way you look at strings, that's for sure.

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For more information, visit: www.santacruzguitar.com





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1956 C.F. MARTIN & CO. D-21

*Tony Werneke of Replay Acoustics unlocks the secrets of
a 1956 C.F. Martin & Co. D-21*

IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Having talked about the pre-war Martin D-28 in last month's issue, I thought it would be a good moment to feature a dreadnought from the series of guitars that Martin started making in the 1850s and have produced continually ever since: the Style 21 guitar. The feature this month is a first-year-of-issue 1956 Martin D-21.

You don't find many 21s around so it's not easy to determine what makes them structurally or sonically different from the 18 or 28 series. It's kind of the 'mystery' group that doesn't fit in with the average player's vocabulary of classic Martin guitars. Yet, throughout their long history, it has proven to be one of their most successful series, produced since before the civil war in varying models.

Intended to be Martin's least expensive rosewood series, it remained in that position until the mid-1990s, whereupon Martin began production of some Style 16 models in rosewood.

What you have with Style 21 is, other than the soundboard and neck, a guitar made completely from rosewood. Rims, back, fingerboard and bridge are all rosewood, unlike the 28 series, which uses ebony for its board and bridge. Now, you might say 'so what?', but I can say with confidence that the difference is tremendous.

Ebony is considerably more dense than rosewood, so any guitar using it in the positions mentioned will invariably have a much crisper, louder tenor with a very quick





response. Together, the two woods saturate the air with huge, complex tones. 'Big' is a pretty inclusive word to describe it.

Rosewood on the other hand (and in this instance Brazilian rosewood) is softer and has less density, therefore creating a sound (when used in the positions mentioned) that has a rounded, silkier character with greater warmth and an attractive woody texture.

So what do we have in the D-21 featured in this article? It is basically a hybrid guitar that sonically lies between a mahogany bodied D-18 and a Brazilian rosewood D-28. The body is solid Brazilian rosewood with a solid Honduran mahogany neck that has no volute at the nut. The fingerboard and bridge are solid Brazilian rosewood as well and the top is solid Sitka spruce. The bracing is straight and of Sitka spruce. The headstock is veneered Brazilian rosewood and the tuners are Kluson single-line closed backs with nickel-plated buttons. The rims are adorned with faux-tortoise bindings and it also has a beautiful butterscotch colored faux-tortoise pickguard only found in the early to mid-50s era. A checkerboard back-

strip completes the appointments.

This particular guitar has the most straight-grained tonewoods available with a beautiful, caramel-like color (unlike the dark, ruby colored Brazilian woods found most of the time). It has the small, maple bridge plate and standard X-bracing with a 1 5/8" nut width. The guitar is crack free and in its original state.

Tonally, the 21 series of guitars tend to have all the volume of a D-28 along with a lingering sustain, complex harmonics and bags of backtone – all characteristics of the Brazilian rosewood body. However – and here is the important thing about the 21 series – the tone and sound of this guitar is absolutely sublime, attributable to the aged Brazilian rosewood fingerboard and bridge.

These appointments blend the warmth and vocal controllability of a great D-18 with the power and willingness of the Brazilian D-28. Tactile and woody with

a crisp yet more subtle attack and a presence that isn't muddy or unclear, the D-21 is more controllable than the big, broody D-28. I have experienced many examples of the 21 series and they are consistent and completely unique from this perspective.

Amazingly, the sustain is as good as an ebony-appointed dreadnought but carries with it the colourful and warm tone of a mahogany-bodied guitar. You will find the rounded voice of great benefit in controlling the 'vibronics' normally associated with Brazilian bodied guitars. It is a delight to play with less to dampen and more to just let run on. Because of its hybrid genetics, it is fully capable of filling the air with a beguiling and well-presented sound you can listen to till the cows come home.

If the D-18 is too woody in a mahogany way and the D-28 is too big and uncontrollable, then the Martin D-21 – and the entire 21 series of guitars – is something to consider. Their complexity is enlightening and very rewarding.

For more information on the Martin D-21, visit the Replay Acoustics website: www.replayacoustics.co.uk



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*As the Deering Banjo Company celebrates its 40th anniversary, Greg Deering speaks to **Acoustic** about the company's genesis and plans to bring the banjo to as many people as possible*

WORDS: LEON HUNT

This year sees one of the world's leading manufacturers of banjos celebrate an impressive four decades in the business. The Deering Banjo Company's longevity and success, in a market that has for almost a century been dominated by Gibson and its ubiquitous Mastertone banjo, is no mean feat.

Four decades and 80,000 banjos down the line, Deering has carved a real niche for itself, providing a range of instruments to suit all styles and budgets. An eye-watering £40,000 should take you to the very top of their Private Collection. However, if like most people you can't quite run to one of those, you could start by looking at their fabulous Goodtime range of student/travel banjos. Just work your way up their now extensive assortment of models to suit all needs and budgets until you find

the instrument that's exactly right for you. The impressive choice Deering now offer isn't all about price and aesthetics either. Deering make six-string banjos for guitarists, tenor and plectrum banjos for 'trad' Irish and jazz players, electric Crossfire banjos for hooligans, banjo ukes for the hard of hearing, and they even now own the classic Vega brand, producing some truly beautiful 'Seeger' long-neck banjos for the folk revivalists. If none of those are enough to talk you out of that Gibson you might still be hankering after, Deering will now happily point you in the direction of the Golden Era range, which seeks to fill the gap left by Gibson, who ceased banjo production in 2009.

We speak to Greg Deering about his company's history, custom made banjos and artist endorsements...

Tell us how it all began. Did you start out as a banjo player who wanted a better banjo than you could afford, or were you instantly drawn to making banjos?

I guess my training as a craftsman began when building model airplanes with my dad when I was two years old. He was an aircraft engineer. He turned me loose to build my first kit by myself when I was five years old. These were flying scale models.

Several years later when I was 13 I fell in love with the Kingston Trio. That's when I bought my first banjo, it was a Harmony if I remember correctly.

Later, when I was in college and performing around town I really needed to get a better banjo but I couldn't afford one. I took a college wood shop class and built one myself. That was the fall of 1969.



How long did you spend making custom banjos before you stepped things up to making production instruments?

In the wood shop class there were two guys, Sam Radding and Lee Folmer, who were interested in building guitars, and I became good friends with them. In May 1970 they opened a shop to build guitars. I helped them set things up and they let me be part of their shop. The shop was called The American Dream. I built banjos, a few guitars and did lots of repair work there. It was during that time that I met Bob Taylor. He was still in high school. I sold him some fret wire and binding that he used to build his first guitar. When he got out of high school he joined the American Dream Shop.

When Janet and I got married I left The American Dream. Janet and I moved to Washington DC for 10 months. While we

were gone Bob Taylor and his friend Kurt Listug bought the only remaining owner of the American Dream, Sam Radding, out and started Taylor Guitars.

When we got back to town I actually worked for Bob and Kurt for a few months. Then I became partners with Geoff Stelling and built his banjos for him. After a few months Geoff dissolved the partnership and asked me and Janet to form Deering Banjo Company, and he contracted to us to build his banjos. So we started as Deering Banjos Co. in the summer of 1975. I spent about four-and-a-half years doing custom work. While we do a lot of production work and have been for 40 years we still do a fair amount of one-of-a-kind custom work.

Do you still have the very first Deering Banjo?

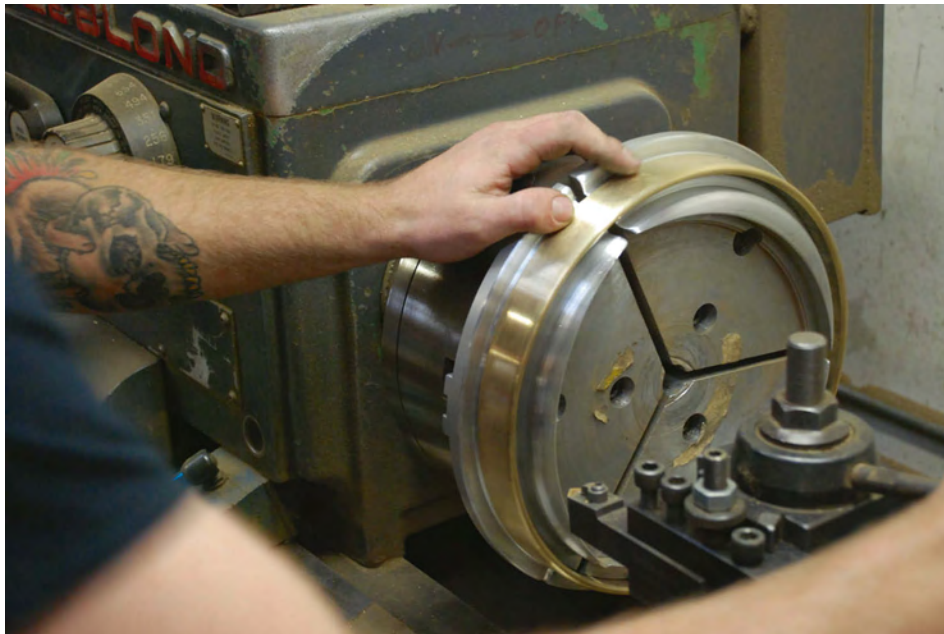
I still have the first banjo I built. It is sitting on

my desk as we speak. I took it apart years ago to rework it but haven't put it back together yet. The Deering logo I designed for that first banjo back in 1969 is the one we still use today.

Let's talk about tone rings. Do you feel that the subtle variations in the alloys used are as critical as the experts would have us believe?

Back in The American Dream days I got to meet an older fellow who was a sales rep for a music distributor. He had worked for Gibson as a purchaser back in the 1920s and 1930s. He would travel to South America to buy rosewood or Africa to buy ebony.

Back in those days the elevated trains were being built in Chicago and the old trolleys were all being scrapped. This fellow told me that he would go down to Chicago, to the scrap yards and buy the bells off the old trolleys and send them to



the foundry to be made into tone rings. He also told me that they'd make tone rings out bronze fire hydrants and manhole covers.

So the alloy of the pre-war Gibson banjos varied a lot. That means that there is more than one red bronze alloy that sounds good. Low lead alloys sound good, and high lead alloys sound good but are a bit sensitive to set up. The alloy is not critical to the sound that you're after. There are a lot of different alloys and a lot of people who love the sound of their banjo. The reality is most of us do not play at a level where we could truly hear the difference.

Playing technique affects the sound that comes out of your banjo much more than the sound of the alloy of your tone ring. The shape and metal of the tone ring as well as the kind of wood and the way your rim is made is much more important than the alloy of the tone ring. We all are in pursuit of the perfect banjo. If we ever truly find the perfect banjo the search will be over and it won't be fun anymore meantime the alloy that we use is put to please virtually everyone who tries our banjos. That's also because the rest of our banjos are correct, which makes the whole instrument perform well.

One of the more impressive moves Deering have made in recent years was coming up with The 'Goodtime' range of banjos, essentially grabbing back some of the budget banjo market from Asia. Not only are they excellent instruments, it actually seems to have worked. Are these now your biggest sellers?

About half our sales are Goodtimes. They are excellent sellers and getting

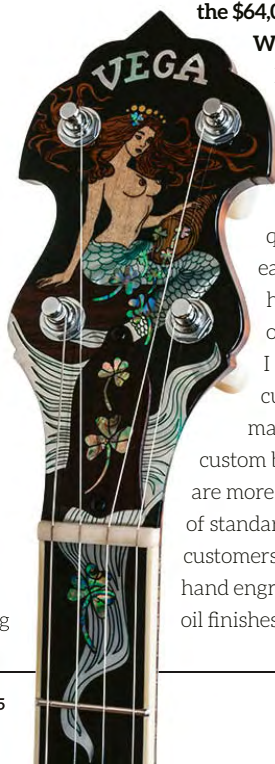
better – especially our new banjo uke, which has been very well received. I designed the Goodtime banjo because I've always been motivated to build a better banjo that everyone can afford. It took me years to develop the design of the Goodtime banjo and to develop the process for making it and still keep the price down and the quality up. Once that was done it took 10 more years to build our company up to the point where we could build the Goodtime banjo.

What makes the Goodtime so special is the emphasis we have put on the tone, the playability and the quality of the instrument. When new players are just starting out, the worst decision they can make is to buy the cheapest banjo available. It may look pretty, but it's so much harder to learn and be excited about the banjo when what you are playing is more of a hindrance to your learning than a help.

I'm intrigued by Deering's Private Collection and the \$64,000 price tag these banjos can carry.

What can you tell me about this?

Deering customers have always been able to get whatever they want. I do most of the artwork myself and the rest is done by our head craftsman Chuck and our quality control manager Chad. In the early years I cut all of the inlays by hand. I've cut many tens of thousands of inlays over the years. Chuck and I still cut custom inlays and do the custom heel carving by hand. Not many of our banjos cost \$64,000, custom banjos in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 are more common. We can do a wide range of standard custom options that any of our customers can take advantage of, including hand engraved hardware, gold plating, linseed oil finishes and much more. However, there are



several customers who come to us with a vision in mind and that's where the real fun begins. We get to create some truly special banjos for customers. Just recently, a customer approached us at the annual Kingston Trio Fantasy Camp in Scottsdale, Arizona and laid out an idea for a banjo that featured a custom mermaid inlay on the peg head. I personally designed the inlays and had several months of personal interaction with the customer, which resulted in a one of a kind banjo that he will treasure for the rest of his life. If a customer has a vision, we will always strive to find a way to make it a reality for them.

I reviewed one of your Eagle banjos that was apparently designed in conjunction with Steve Noon at Eagle Music here in the UK. Can you tell me a little bit about this and the relationship you have with Eagle Music?

The Eagle banjo was developed because Jens Kruger and Phillip Zannon discovered that when a note is put into a Gibson style tone ring the overtones are out of harmony with the input note. The three of us spent three years searching for a ring design that would produce overtones in harmony with the input notes. The 2010 tone ring and the Eagle banjo are the results.

The name was determined as we were driving back to London after a Deering Day at Eagle Music's shop in Huddersfield. I'm sure that just having been at Eagle Music had a lot to do with our name choice. But it's also because I am an Eagle Scout and our logo is an eagle. Steve Noon has the #1 Eagle banjo. It's a special gold plated and engraved version.

I suppose it's a little odd for our number one dealer to be in Huddersfield. But is not odd that Eagle Music, Steve Noon, Joan, Rachel, James, Allen and the whole Eagle Music crew are our number one dealer. Steve has banjos in his blood. He seems better at taking care of his customers than anyone I have ever met. He's also brilliant at marketing the banjo and inspiring people to love and play the banjo and know the joy of making music. All of the Eagle Music team makes this happen. I'm sure they'd be number one wherever they were.

Eagle Music will be hosting a 40th anniversary event at The North Light Gallery, Huddersfield on Saturday 7 November. 11.00am till 11.00pm

The day will include a performances from Deering ambassadors, the Kruger Brothers, banjo workshops in a variety of styles and a Q&A session with Greg and Janet Deering, discussing 40 years producing some of the world's finest banjos.

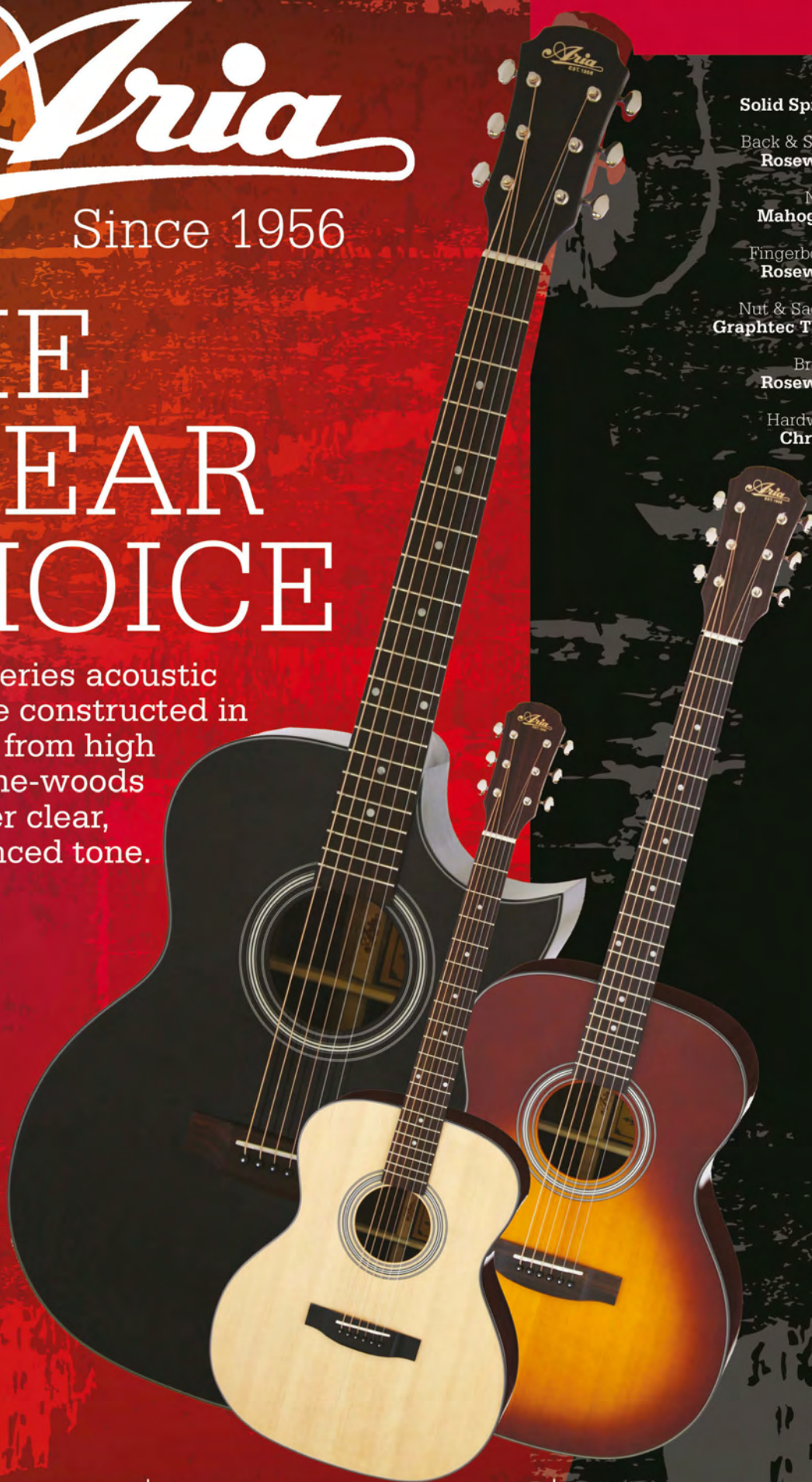
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RETUNE YOUR EARS

*Paul Strange interviews four new
artists for you to check out*



CHRIS CLEVERLEY

STYLE... (CONTEMPORARY FOLK)

My debut album *Apparitions* was conceived during a six-month stay in a haunted house in the Midlands – a region I consider my home. The songs are about memory, and ghosts are an interesting analogy for revisiting the past. This particularly comes through on the title track and 'Life Is Elsewhere'. The album was recorded at Rhythm Studios by Paul Johnston, who did an incredible job. It was an unbelievable inspiration working with old, dear friends such as Kim Lowings [organ, backing vocals], Dave Sutherland [double bass] and Steph Gabb [vocals], and a huge privilege to have Marion Fleetwood of the Jigantics putting her stamp on the string arrangements. It was the collaborative approach we took that allowed the songs to flourish. All of them were written on my Martin OMCPA4 rosewood semi-acoustic with the 14-fret cutaway. For me the neck is hugely important – if I have flexibility and ease of playing then it encourages me to take on more experimental, challenging ideas. It's the only guitar I play, which I think is a strong indicator that it suits my style. Tonally, it meets all my requirements, from emphasising the lightest, most delicate fingerstyle touches to more ferocious chordal playing. I play through an AER Alpha 40 watt acoustic amp, which runs straight into a PA for live work. It's a perfect, practical set-up that suits anything from an intimate setting to a packed concert hall. I'm exclusively a fingerstyle player, which links back to having studied classical guitar then applying those techniques to folk. I play every day, practising songs or styles or experimenting with new sounds, tunings or techniques. I'm a big fan of alternate tunings. *Apparitions* features predominantly C major, DADGAD and Drop D, with only a couple of songs in standard tuning. Band rehearsals for the next album have already started, and I'll be promoting *Apparitions* around the UK for the rest of the year, with the official launch gig at Birmingham's ORT Café on 7 November.

<http://chriscleverley.com>

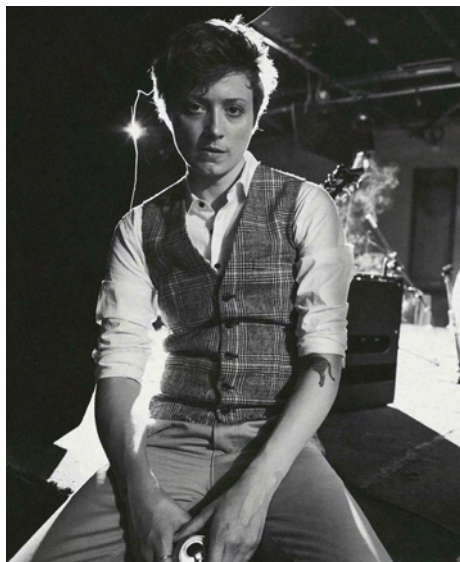


BOBBY LONG

STYLE... (FOLK BLUES)

For me, writing songs is a process that starts with coffee and ends with going for a walk. I usually sit down and push on through. I focus on telling stories, and writing lyrics that are important to me. My songs are inspired by everything really – films, stories, songs and books. My latest album, *Ode To Thinking*, is a progression from my previous work in terms of songwriting. I feel that I have honed in a bit on what I wanted to come across and say. I wanted to let the songs speak for themselves. It is definitely my most personal album so far. I wanted to show a different side of myself – personal experiences, social commentary, love songs. I wrote the title track with a lot of social frustrations running round my head – it's a bit sarcastic and spoken from an ivory tower, too. Now living in New York, I was born in Wigan and grew up in Wiltshire and London. I guess I'd describe my music as folk/blues-based – my acoustic heroes include John Martyn, Neil Young, Mississippi John Hurt and Elliott Smith. I always write on an acoustic, it centres the song for me. I play a Gibson J-200, sunburst – it's great, and getting better with age. For live work I use a Matchless amp, and also have a beautiful Hofner Thinline President, but I'll use whatever's around. I am a self-taught guitarist – I learned a few chords from my dad but I've never had a lesson. I do practise every day, though – I enjoy developing ideas and learning new styles. I like the dynamic that playing both pick and fingerstyle offers, and I use open G or open D and drop D tunings. Since releasing the album, I've been busy touring, and will be coming to Europe and the UK in October and November. The most important thing I've learned as a musician? Be yourself, don't try and be somebody else. Then you'll never lose your integrity.

www.bobbylong.info



MO KENNEY

STYLE... (POP/ROCK/FOLK)

My regular guitar is a Hensel parlour acoustic from the 1930s. I bought it from the Halifax Folklore Centre, not far from where I live in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. It's an incredible instrument. When I strum I use a pick, but I mostly finger pick. It's not so great when I have to strum a tune, but it sounds beautiful finger picked and it has an incredible warm tone. I use a Fishman Rare Earth soundhole pickup and then I plug into a DI. The Hensel is my favourite, but when I'm playing with my band I use a 1974 Gibson ES-335. I also use FX pedals – an MXR Analog delay and an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail reverb – with both guitars. I find it hard to put my music into a genre, but I'd stick it in the pop/rock/folk categories. Everything inspires my songwriting – there are lots of songs about love on last year's album, *In My Dreams*, but they're not all love songs. The title track is an unrequited love song, about someone out of reach, but my favourite is 'Field Song', as I liked how it turned out. I feel the record is a progression from my first, *Mo Kenney*. There's a lot more production, and I think my songwriting and voice have progressed as well. I usually begin writing a new song on my acoustic. Sometimes I have a phrase and melody in my head and start with that. I took guitar lessons for some years and then taught myself the rest. I try to play every day – it's rare I go a day without picking a guitar up. Alternate tunings? Yes – I use a weird drop C tuning sometimes. It's CGCEGC. 'Wind Will Blow' is in that tuning. I'm currently about to go out on tour. I'll be in the UK in September, then Germany in October. While I'm home I'm writing lots so that I have enough material to choose from when it's time to make a new record.

www.mokenney.com



JENN GRANT

STYLE... (INDIE FOLK POP)

I'm a singer-songwriter living in Lake Echo, Nova Scotia, Canada, with my husband and producer Daniel Ledwell. My latest album, *Compostela*, was released last year, and was nominated for two Junos [Canada's annual music awards]. Sonically and emotionally I put more into it than any of the others – we spent a whole year making it in a studio we built here. I lost my mother to cancer in 2012 and making this album was a healing experience – her spirit is running through the record. When my mother died, I immediately went to Spain and did a lot of grieving there. I took the beauty of the landscape and put them into the layers of these songs. Since Spain became such a part of the experience, I wanted to give the album a Spanish title – *Compostela* translates as 'Field Of Stars'. The song that's meant the most to people is 'Bring Me A Rose'. It's about my mother, and honours all mothers. I play fingerstyle, and prefer a guitar with a smaller body and neck. I had intensive surgery on my wrist in 2011 and it's easier for me to play a smaller neck. My Stonebridge OOM33SR has a smaller body with a light finish, thin neck, and black and gold detailing around the edges. It sounds clear, and keeps its tune well. I use a DI, a TC Electronic HOF Mini reverb pedal and a MXR Carbon Copy delay pedal. Sometimes I play an electric Eastwood Airline Tuxedo CB – a remake of a vintage Airline guitar – and an Omnichord. I write music most days that I'm home. I often use an acoustic guitar for composing, but right now most of my songwriting is on the piano. From September until next year I'll be touring the UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia. My UK appearances are: London Green Note (26 September), Brighton Prince Albert (27 September), Manchester Gullivers (30 September), Birmingham Sunflower Lounge (1 October) and Glasgow Arlington Baths (2 October).

www.jenngrant.com

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The Fall and Rise of Hugh Cornwell

HUGH CORNWELL

THE FALL AND RISE OF HUGH CORNWELL
www.hughcornwell.com

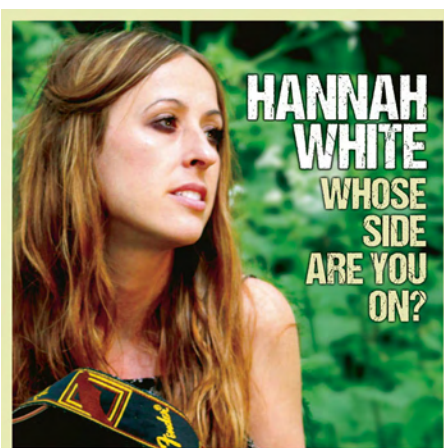
Twenty-five years on from leaving one of the UK's most loved post-punk/new wave bands, *the Fall and Rise of Hugh Cornwell* is the first ever anthology of Hugh Cornwell's post-Stranglers career. The album brings together 12 choice cuts taken from his first six solo albums, plus one brand new studio recording. Cornwell's simple vocal arrangements sit over well-crafted songs. But you'd expect that, emanating as they do from the same biro that penned classics such as 'Golden Brown' and 'No More Heroes'... It goes without saying this recording is a must for any Stranglers fan, but fans of Matt Costa, the Pretenders and Simple Minds should also pay attention.



MICHAEL ARMSTRONG

MICHAEL ARMSTRONG
www.michaelarmstrongmusic.co.uk

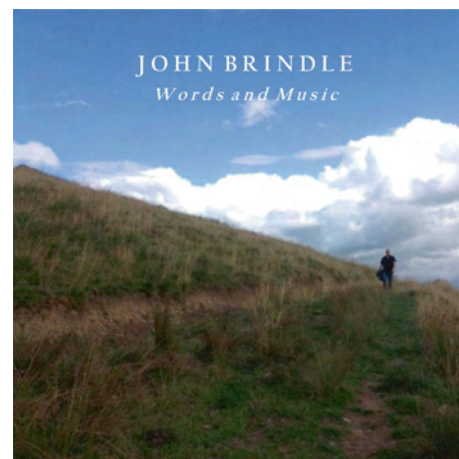
Life dealt something of a bad hand to Michael Armstrong. Forced to close the family construction business due to ill health and economic turmoil, Armstrong saw an opportunity to pursue his long-held ambition for a career in music. A chance meeting with his now manager sparked a series of events that would lead to the release of his 2012 EP. The 12 songs on this self-titled album are nothing but joyous. Elvis Costello-esque lead vocals are supported by Eagles-like harmonies, which sit upon songs that give a nod to ELO and McCartney – two of his major influences. Perhaps covering the latter's 'Maybe I'm Amazed' was a mistake, but it's still a thumbs up from us.



HANNAH WHITE

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?
www.hannahwhitemusic.com

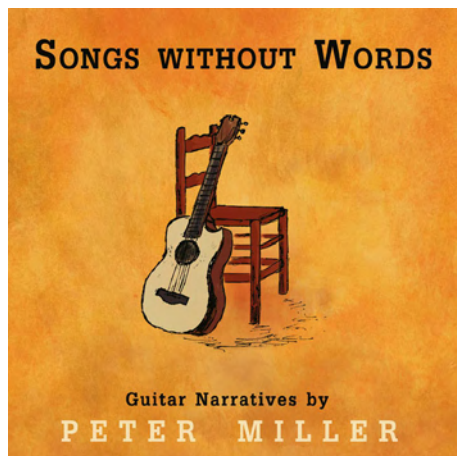
A BBC Introducing artist (like George Ezra before her), Hannah White's voice is arresting and wholly believable. Sounding like a Fleetwood Mac influenced Suzanne Vega, washed with folk overtones, *Whose Side Are You On?* is a strident, colourful album which belies a darker undercurrent. An active feminist, White sings about life as a single mum amid a political system and social backdrop against which women are compromised and judged. In truth, White's vocal abilities are stronger than her songwriting but the nine songs bear repeat plays. The standout track is 'Whoops', a song about a woman questioned as a potential drug trafficker. Definitely worth a listen.



JOHN BRINDLE

WORDS AND MUSIC
www.johnbrindlemusic.co.uk

Words and Music is John Brindle's fourth solo recording. Citing Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Roger McGuinn, James Taylor and Jackson Browne among his influences, Brown's 11-song album is a simple and honest offering that, by the artist's own admission, is primarily designed to secure opportunities to perform live. Brindle's guitar playing is solid rather than fancy, and the songs themselves are basic rather than memorable. Sadly, we can't shake the feeling that it's Brindle's vocals that let this work down. Perhaps in a live setting, Brindle is able to breathe more life into the set, but *Words and Music* is a little too naive and two-dimensional for a second listen.

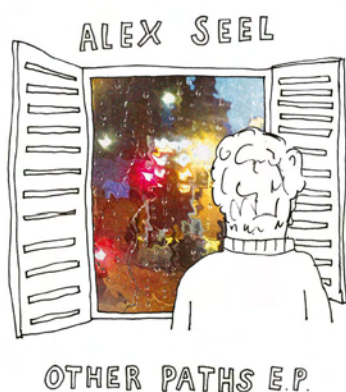


PETER MILLER

SONGS WITHOUT WORDS

www.peter-miller.com

Queensland based fingerstyle guitarist, Peter Miller, has built for himself a following both in his homeland and Ireland. Having toured Europe extensively, sharing a stage with John Spillane, Eoin Duignan and Stephen Housden, Miller is set to extend his following to the UK. This melodic instrumental album is delicate, tuneful and beautifully played. Dipping in and out of alternate tunings including DADGAD, drop D and CGCGCD, Miller shows why he has won Best Instrumental album 2015 at the Australian Celtic Music Awards. Sounding like a softer, gentler Tony McManus, *Songs Without Words* is a credible addition to any fingerstyle lover's music collection.



ALEX SEEL

OTHER PATHS

www.alexseel.com

The five songs on the *Other Paths* EP show off Alex Seel's charming finger-picking skills as well as his honest, likeable voice. Citing Bert Jansch as one of his leading sources of inspiration, Seel's songs are open, sparse and earthy – no doubt due to having lived in a caravan by the sea for a few years. "It was bound to have an influence on what I write about," says Alex. The EP's opening track, 'Oh The Glamour' is perhaps the strongest track. With its Lumineers-esque catchy hooks, vocal harmonies and picked riffs, the song would sit comfortably on Radio 2's current play list. Seel is certainly one to watch, particularly if you like McCartney's early solo acoustic work.



IRENE RAE

HIDDEN SECRET

www.irenerae.com

Irene Rae's musical influences are nothing if not varied. Citing Motown, the Beatles, Bon Jovi, Barbra Streisand and Adam and the Ants as some of her earliest musical memories, Rae has produced an album of mid-tempo ballads which sit somewhere between Norah Jones, Lisa Loeb and Sarah McLachlan. Readers of this magazine might prefer less piano and a little more acoustic guitar, but the songs are engaging and likable. Having taught herself the guitar at 22, Rae admits that theory is still a mystery to her. "I struggle to name the basic chords I play, I know I should learn, but I like the fact that if I don't know the rules, I don't know how to stick to them." Fair play, Ms Rae.



FREDDIE STEVENSON

THE DARKENING/THE BRIGHTENING

www.freddiestevenson.net

Co-produced with Waterboys' singer Mike Scott, *The Darkening/ The Brightening* comprises 18 short songs arranged into two montages. As you've no doubt guessed, the songs on *The Darkening* section are gloomy and melancholy, while *The Brightening* songs are more uplifting and holistic. Mike Scott commented, "This album is Freddie's finest work, a thing of rare beauty, and surely one of the best folk albums of our time." Praise indeed. While Stevenson does have a fine voice, and the collection of songs is certainly engaging, it's obviously not the best folk album of our time. Not that that should prevent you seeking this album out – it's worth investing time in.



G D SWEENEY

THE TRUTH ABOUT LIES

www.gdsweeney.com

Irish-born, London-based singer-songwriter G D Sweeney's latest album is a collection of musical tales illustrating how people can tangle themselves in a web of their own deceit. "The album title refers to a poem I wrote called 'The Truth About Lies'. Every lie has a truth behind it whether you are deceiving someone else or just yourself," said Sweeney. The album is an 'in-your-face' assault fusing bluegrass, country and Irish music, – and very enjoyable it is too. Evoking images of beer-fuelled hoedowns where men wear checked shirts and the women look like Daisy Duke, *The Truth Is Out* is a believable, fun-packed ride through some of acoustic music's most raw forms.



INDIA ELECTRIC CO.

THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME

www.indiaelectric.com

It's always been difficult to pigeon hole the restless musical spirit that is Cole Stacey. After flirting with the fringes of folk, he and his musical partner Joseph O'Keefe are again ringing the changes. With O'Keefe providing most of the tasty instrumentation, the opener, 'Lost In Translation', has Cole's smoky vocals riding over syncopated guitar lines, and O'Keefe's stuttering fiddle threatening to slide off the Richter scale. The pair seem to be able to pull off just about anything that comes their way: the pain-wracked, acoustic-based 'I Can't Make You Love Me' and the bouncy rustic folkly title track included. You can't help wondering where they'll go next.



MIA AND THE MOON

FALL AWAKE

www.miaandthemoon.com

With a host of high-profile endorsements to their name, Mia and the Moon are two sisters who began singing together as toddlers at National Bluegrass Festivals. Mary-Anne and Laura Ratcliffe have a promising future ahead of them. The girls can undoubtedly sing, as their *X Factor* appearances attest to, but it's their song-craft that sets them apart from the crowd. Strong, controlled vocals are underpinned with beautifully-engineered, rich instrumentation. *Fall Awake* showcases talents way beyond their years. In a sense, we're glad they didn't get further than *X Factor's* boot camp – they're better than that. Miss this and miss out.

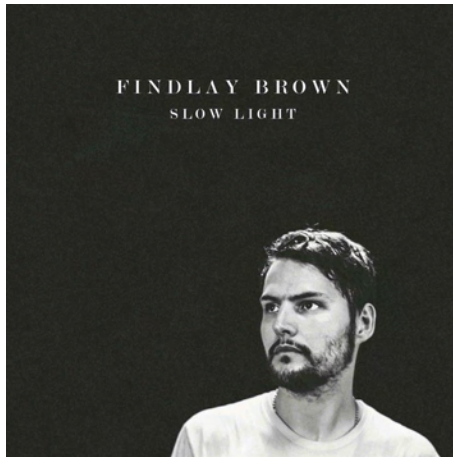


EMILY PORTMAN

CORACLE

www.emilyportman.co.uk

Glastonbury-based Emily Portman's first entirely self-penned release follows the success of her BBC Folk award-winning album *Hatchling*, which won best original song 2013. Such an accolade reflects the esteem in which Portman is held by her contemporaries. *Coracle* is an eerie, haunting body of work, drawing on deeply personal reflections on motherhood and bereavement. It's too easy to pigeon hole *Coracle* as a folk album, though fundamentally that's what it is. Rather repeated listening opens up a world of intricate, poignant and bare songs which conjure up images of darkly surreal netherworlds where folklore and myth collide with urban landscapes.



FINDLAY BROWN

SLOW LIGHT

www.findlaybrown.com

Findlay Brown's third solo album was written and recorded over a two year period in New York, Brown's home since 2010, and sees a return to his original folk-pop sound. "I see what I'm doing now as the beginning of something. In a sense I'm always trying to find a new way to say the same thing." Produced by Tobias Wilner of Blue Foundation and DPC Records, Brown credits Wilner with steering his natural aptitude for the melancholic and melodic. Scant and ethereal, *Slow Light* is well crafted and manages to somehow be melancholy yet uplifting at the same time, such is the strength of the work.



CONOR COUGHLAN

GIVE IT UP

www.conorcoughlanmusic.com

The debut album release from 19-year-old British singer-songwriter Conor Coughlan. Heavily influenced by his father's musical tastes including Neil Young, the Rolling Stones and Bruce Springsteen, his musical influences were augmented when the family moved to Saskatoon, Canada – the home of Joni Mitchell – for six years. Amalgamating these formative inspirations, *Give It Up* is an upbeat, happy album full of memorable melodies, well-structured harmonies and insightful, honest lyrics. Sounding like the love child of Del Amitri's Justin Currie and Crowded House's Neil Finn, and with sound song-writing skills, Coughlan is set for good things.



FRANC CINELLI

THE MARVEL AGE

www.franccinelli.com

Written over the course of Cinelli's extensive 2013-2014 tours of the UK, US and his native Italy, *The Marvel Age* is a self-produced, acoustic guitar-based collection of mid- and up-tempo songs with minimal instrumentation – in the main consisting of just drums, bass and guitar and the occasional piano. Cinelli's vocals are a perfect blend of Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler, Tom Petty, Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan which gives him a maturity beyond his years. *The Marvel Age* is best described as a 'road' album, evoking as it does images of long distance car journeys through barren wastelands. Fans of the aforementioned artists should check this out.



SARAH CLASS

UNITY

www.sarahclass.com

Award-winning composer, Sarah Class, took five years to complete *Unity*, focussing on writing in between commissions. The involvement of Grammy Award-winning producer Jay Newland (Norah Jones, Gregory Porter) bears fruit as the range of instrumentation and production values are excellent. Class plays piano, Hammond organ, keyboards and acoustic guitar on most of the tracks though, sadly, the songwriting doesn't quite match the musicianship. These are simple, pleasant songs but they lack that something that turns a tune into a memorable song. References to a 'poor man's Kirstie McCall' might be a little harsh and unfair, but they're not far off the mark.

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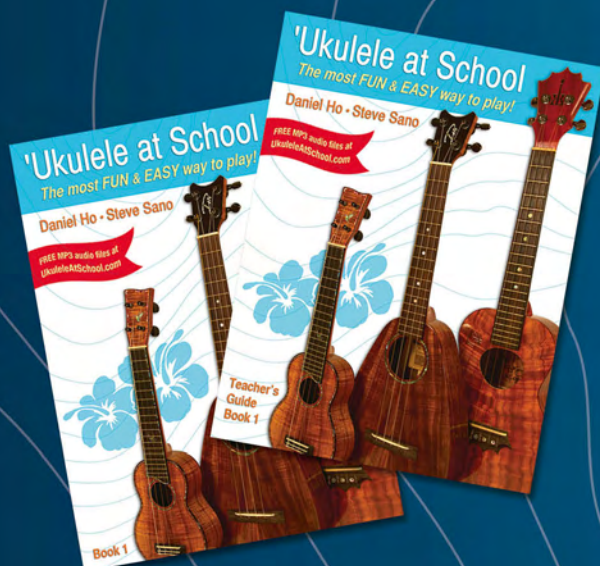
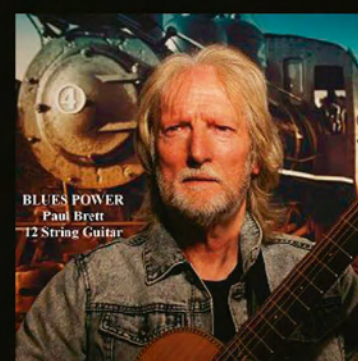


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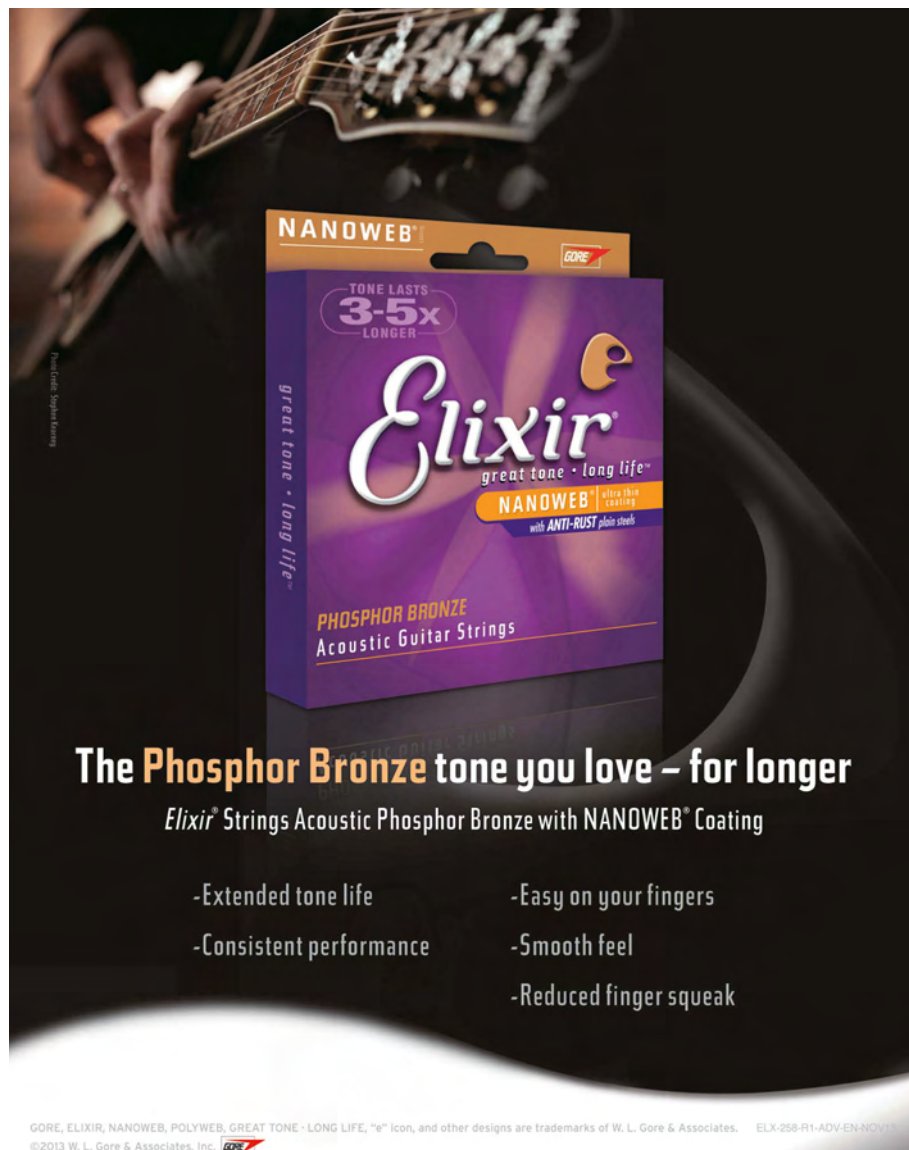
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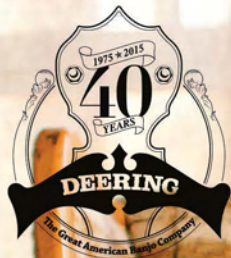
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A technical study from an often overlooked guitar composer

I'd like to introduce you to the music of one of the 19th century's lesser-known guitarist composers, Giulio Regondi. He was born in Geneva 1822 and died in London in 1872. Regondi was a child prodigy and rapidly became a virtuoso on both the guitar and concertina; he was giving public concerts by the age of eight. Within the next four years he had performed in most European capitals. Unlike the works of other prominent guitar composers of the period such as Sor, Giuliani and Carulli, much of Regondi's music almost disappeared, as it was considered difficult

to the point of being virtually unplayable. In 1981 the publisher Chanterelle released an anthology entitled *Regondi: The Complete Works for Guitar*, edited by Simon Wynberg. The book featured five substantial pieces (opp. 19-23) plus four etudes without opus numbers. For many years a friend of mine, the musicologist Matanya Ophee, had been searching for the manuscripts of *10 Etudes* by Regondi that he knew existed. He finally tracked them down in Russia and published the complete set in 1995: *Giulio Regondi: Ten Etudes for Guitar* (Editions Orphée, PWYS-17CR). Curiously I managed to

acquire a manuscript copy of the ninth etude many years earlier completely unaware of the fact that Ophee was searching for them. My copy varies very slightly to the Orphée published edition.

Many of Regondi's pieces are lengthy and virtuosic, but *Etude No.9* is more technically straightforward and concise, lasting a little over two and a half minutes. Most guitar composers from this period avoided wandering too far from the home keys; Regondi's music can be more harmonically adventurous. *Etude No.9* is in E major but soon begins modulating.

Larghetto

7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7

2 4 0 4 4 0 2

2 4 CIV CIV CIV CIV CIV CIV CV

3

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The purpose of an etude (or study) is to improve a certain aspect of technique. The technical aims of many of Regondi's etudes are fairly obvious, though a little less so in this case. Here the upper note of each chord provides a melodic line that must be projected. Legato playing is absolutely crucial and, in order to achieve this, well thought-out left hand fingering is essential. The slow tempo may help, of course. Many of Regondi's guitar works are now available in facsimiles of the original publications and one of the first things you'll notice is there are no fingering suggestions. It means giving adequate thought to this before you commence learning a piece. The Orphée publication has some fingering suggestions and string numbers provided; the fingerings shown here are mine. With a piece such as this always

try to find fingerings that connect one chord to another either by anchoring a note common to both chords or by sliding a finger from one chord to the next. The piece may become a little easier once you discover several bars feature sequential phrases and fingerings. I consider effective fingering to be a part of the study element.

Much of the indicated fingering should be self-explanatory, however there is a slightly unorthodox fingering required at the beginning of the fourth full bar: the first finger holds the low E in the chord and the second finger is then placed over the top of this to play the B bass note; sustain the B as the first finger slides down to the D sharp. A similar procedure occurs towards the end of bar seven.

In an earlier article I mentioned the use of the 'pivot barré' technique where the tip of the

first finger lifts leaving the base of the finger in contact with the string; an example of where this can be employed to good effect occurs in bar 16, thus avoiding a clumsy move for the first finger. Physically the trickiest thing in the piece could be shaping the final chord in the given time – it's a stretch and there's no connection with the previous chord. In Regondi's music dynamics are very few and far between – there are none in this piece. I suggest following the shape of the melodic line: as the music ascends reinforce it with a higher dynamic.

As you'll find from several sites on the internet, Regondi had a very interesting career. His works for guitar are now readily available (in both facsimile and reprint); I strongly recommend you investigate some of the other pieces – but don't expect an easy ride. ■

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MIKE DAWES FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

'SOMEWHERE HOME'

Part three of this Celtic-inspired fingerstyle piece

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

Welcome back to the breakdown of my Celtic-inspired fingerstyle piece 'Somewhere Home'.

This month's column comes to you from the Justin Hayward tour bus somewhere in northern Illinois. I've been playing this tune a lot out here and I'm particularly enjoying sharing 'the jiggy bit' with the audiences – and it just so happens we'll be looking at that

exact section today – and I'm also looking forward to sharing it with you.

This column brings us to part three. If you haven't been following the previous sections be sure to dig out those old magazines. As before, we are in DADGAD tuning with a capo on the second fret. There is a 6/8 feel but we're currently still in free time.

Let's start off by taking a look at **example 1**, which sees us picking up from after the

'James Bond chord' we looked at in *Acoustic 108*. Here we are introducing the jig's theme. This extract is split into three phrases, and all three echo portions of the upcoming melody. This is where we begin to hint at a solid 6/8 time, with subtle pauses as indicated.

Legato playing is often utilised to assist in performing very quick phrases in fingerstyle music. Tony McManus and the late, great John Renbourn are two fantastic examples of this within the Celtic fingerstyle scene. In this extract, I'm using hammer-ons and pull-offs to not only maintain speed, but to keep a smooth and gentle tone throughout the passage.

This brief extract that is shown in **example 2** is the first point in the piece where our 6/8 rhythm becomes consistent. We start with an aggressive slap and the introduction of the kick drum (which is the heel of the right hand striking the top, just above the strings where the hand naturally sits). We conclude the bar with some artificial harmonics on the 12th fret (played with the picking hand).

Another noteworthy moment is the addition of the body tap on the first beat of the second bar in the extract. To achieve this, simply tap anywhere below the strings with the tips of your fingers. Now on to **example 3** and the jig...

As you can hear, the theme is present and accompanied by the legato techniques we discussed. The majority of the passage is made up of eighth notes (quavers) with some interesting patterns to add movement. The kick drums we discussed are transcribed on the percussion stave, these beats are

EXAMPLE 1

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EXAMPLE 2

Tap guitar top

♩ = 172

Ex2

Guitar

Percussion

mf

let ring

EXAMPLE 3

Ex3

Guitar

Percussion

mf

let ring

EXAMPLE 4

Ex4

Guitar

Percussion

let ring

supposed to enforce the upbeat feel of the section.

Now there is something a little less conventional that I must mention. About halfway through this extract we see some clusters of top string notes on frets seven, nine and 11. These are picked with three separate fingers at speed, A, M, and I (as listed in the notation) I picked up this technique from a Tony McManus DVD. Tony's arrangements are filled with quick and clever trills and this is definitely a nod to his influence on my own playing, and specifically this piece.

The jig itself is mostly built around the E major scale, with the addition of the minor 7th on occasion.

After you have practiced the E major jig on a loop and you feel comfortable with it, we can now turn it into a melancholy and 'pirate-like' minor variation. We will not have time in this month's column to look at the full minor section, but this intro fill (example 4) is just as fun to play. Again, note the legato solution to quick passages in fingerstyle.

That concludes this month's column folks. See you all next time for the minor jig, some crazy tapping stuff and every harmonic technique under the sun.



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CHRIS GIBBONS COMPOSER

MASTERING COUNTRY GUITAR

Joining the dots in the second part of our country guitar series

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

In the first article on country guitar, we looked at simple strumming patterns and how we can make them more interesting by picking out the bass notes of the chord.

In this issue we'll take a look at ways we can use simple connecting lines to move between chords, and how those lines can be developed into intros and breaks to build a simple chord sequence into a more musical performance.

In order to understand these exercises fully, it helps to know the scale, or row of notes, from which these connecting runs are constructed, and in fact where the notes that form the chords are derived.

The scale we are using in this issue is G major, and I have written the scale and tab fingering before **example 1** for reference.

The chords we are using are G, C, D and D7. The G chord is made up of three notes of the scale: G, B and D. The C chord: C, E and G. The D chord: D, F# and A.

And the D7 chord is D with C added. Common fingerings for these chords are provided above the notation and tab.

So let's see how this works: **example 1** has two bars of G moving to two bars of C and back again. We use the scale notes in the bass register to move from the root note of the G chord up to C and then walk down the scale to G.

See how you alternate between a picked bass note, a strummed chord and the notes which connect the chords.

Play slowly while paying attention to producing a clean tone from the bass notes and trying to achieve a relaxed flow between the single notes and the chords.

Chris Gibbons

G scale

ex 1

ex 2

ex 3

12

18

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RICHARD GILEWITZ FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

VARIATION ON A 12 BAR BLUES

Richard shares his tips on how to spice up this universal jamming staple – but recommends you put the time in

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

We have all heard that music is a universal language that crosses boundaries, while also being easily identified as being from a certain period, corner of the world, or from a specific culture. As we recognise specific scales, modes, rhythms, and accents, our minds travel to somewhere deep down in our souls.

One of the most notable platforms in music is the blues, particularly the basic 12-bar blues, which are simply a series of chords in a basic progression or form and played in a cyclical fashion. The 12-bar blues can sometimes appear with an undercurrent of a rhythmic shuffle, swing, or boogie-woogie. These baseline chord progressions can also appear as eight and 16-bar variations. Because only three chords are generally involved that is easily varied. It is a standard jamming form with many players, as it requires very little verbal communication if there is a pre-determined agreement on a few minor points.

When hearing this form, the listener often seems to find that sweet spot of a recognisable style, desired on the receiving end as a means of therapy or an unobtrusive background ambiance. We know that music can inspire in many ways with elements of surprise through unpredictable chord changes, the angularity of a melodic pattern, an accented rhythm, mixed meters, and so forth. However, sometimes we just want to settle in to that simple groove.

Although there are a plethora of variations on a 12 bar blues, I will now share with you not just a very common one, but one that allows some very nice chord substitutions to

provide a bit more spice to the mix.

A standard grounding is found with the following series of chords using the key of E as an example:

E	A	E	E
A	A	E	E
B7	A	E	B7

Some considerations will be the tempo of the music; I suggest something in the neighborhood of 80 beats per minute on your metronome in order to set a slow and steady groove. Often folks have a tough time embracing that ever-elusive element of restraint. How many times have you heard a band or bandmate starting to go faster and faster... and faster until things spiral out of control? Don't get me wrong, with an experienced set of players, and when controlled properly, this type of effect can be exciting and energetic. Nevertheless, if the players are not tight, it will sound like a run-away train.

In your developmental years as a player, I recommend seeing how long you can stay in the pocket and maintain the groove. See if you can play with your eyes closed and stick with the click. Try to move your mind around the room to listen to other sounds surrounding you besides your own playing or the click. This will train you to be available to listen to the other players around you. Be aware of your breathing as well. I've seen numerous cases, myself included, where a lack of some semblance of breath control leads to hiccups in the timing of the music and adds unnecessary

tension for the player and listener.

Now, let's return to the chord chart and your first simple variation. Make all of the chords 7th chords. For the E7, simply use two fingers and omit your third finger on string four when playing the standard E major chord.

For the A7 chord, once again use only two fingers. Place your second finger on string four, fret two and your third finger on string two, fret two. Do no more than that for those two chords.

I'm absolutely convinced that one of the major pitfalls for players to avoid is learning too much too fast, and neglecting to engage in a few hundred iterations to solidify their technique.

It is almost a bit comical when I have a student trying repeatedly to get a pattern or chord change right, and after many failed attempts, they finally nail it, proudly look up at me and say, "There, I got it!" I cannot help but chuckle a bit and say, "Yeah, I usually try and get it right only once, too." In other words, when you get it right you are only at the beginning. You have the foundation dug, now you have to add the cement.

I recall one time when I turned on the metronome while working with a student. For the entire lesson he was so far off I thought we were both in trouble. Maybe I was having a bad coffee day. Totally exasperated, I remember finally saying, "Are you even listening to this thing?"

He looked up surprised and said, "What thing?"

I pointed and said, "This! The metronome."

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12 BAR BLUES IN E - RICHARD GILEWITZ

He replied, "Oh, no."
 "Why do you think I had it on?" His reply still puts me on the floor and I'm glad we're good friends.

He said, "I don't know. I guess you wanted to hear it."

Now, once again back on target with the beauty of the blues. There are many different chord qualities to consider when playing or composing a piece of music. Major chords are interpreted as happy; minor chords sad; major 7ths have a bit of an 'islandy feeling' as I like to call it; there's a bit of an edge to a basic 7th chord and so forth. Pick your own feel or visual for these chords.

I include here some variations on the standard 12 bar blues that will include 7th chords, minor 7th chords, and an augmented chord (the B7+9). You will notice that some of the chords are movable shapes. In other words, once you set the chord down initially, as is the case with the G#m7 in bar eight and the G7 in bar 11, you simply navigate down one fret to continue.

Notice a basic picking pattern suggested in order to maintain steadiness throughout the 12 bars. The initial note, played with your thumb, is a pickup note from each previous measure to offer a nice little intro to each bar. Observe that on beat one, since you just played the thumb, you will only use three fingers, i, m and a, or index, middle and ring. I also like playing these in what I call position two, which is when that grouping of fingers resides on strings four, three and two. When grouped on strings three, two and one, I call that position one. When they are grouped on

Basic Rhythm and Picking Pattern

strings five, four and three, I refer to that as position three. I've had tremendous success with this as an initial foundation, although I admit that I now bounce all over the place from these generic locations. They do however provide a very good start.

Initially try to develop your transfers from chord to chord with slow and methodical movements without the use of a metronome or involving your picking hand. If you have

trouble fingering the minor seventh chords as suggested, feel free to simply use your entire index finger for a full bar. Once you've picked up a bit of fluidity, apply the metronome. Start at a slow speed in order to incorporate an even passage from chord to chord – perhaps as slow as 60BPM. Then when you feel that you are ready, add the picking hand. After you've done this for about 40 years, call a friend up to come over and jam with you. ■

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GORDON GILTRAP INSTRUMENTAL ARTIST

'RACHEL'S REFLECTIONS'

A classic DADGAD Giltrap composition with Ralph McTell and John Renbourn influences

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

You have probably read many times that I love the challenge of composing pieces for specific people and special occasions. Most of the time it is for a specific person, and once one has been given the brief you have the task as a composer to somehow fulfill that brief by creating something that truly reflects that person's character and nature.

'Rachel's Reflections' is one such piece. I knew I had got it right when the lady in question and her other half turned up at a concert and requested that I play it during the evening. How could I refuse? There were whoops of delight as the final note faded away – a great feeling indeed!

This tune is a prime example of how you can start experimenting with shapes and riffs. I had written a piece called 'Maddie Goes West' in the same fingerpicking pattern as this piece. One day I tried playing the same opening riff as 'Maddie Goes West' but in DADGAD. It sounded good to my ears and a new tune was born. A

lesson to be learned here: always experiment because you never know what you may come up with!

I need to point out a couple of things along the way. In bars eight, nine, 17, 18, 19, 20, 35, 36 and 37 we have a hammered note on the second fret, fifth string which is not particularly challenging, but it is important to sound them as clearly as possible to assist with the general flow of these sections.

Let's go back to the top of the piece where the first six bars feature what I would call the verse. This has a gently rocking alternate bass pattern running through it. This is what I would describe as a sort of "claw hammer" feel, reminiscent of maybe Ralph McTell's lovely relaxed style of American influenced picking. These verses are the glue that holds it all together.

Please be careful at bars 16 and 34 where I'm pulling off from the seventh fret to an open string after playing a note at the eighth fret second string. This is fine but then the last notes

at the end of the bar require me to quickly drop down to the second fret position to execute that double note slide.

I have always found this a tad challenging and, although it isn't written in the music, you may find a slight *rallentando* into bar 24 would assist in the change of hand position, thus giving you a bit of breathing space before you tackle the rest of that section. When I was composing that section, I truly felt John Renbourn's influence here. He was, and still is, a huge influence on my approach to composition.

Moving on we look at the last four notes of bar 24 which are the same four notes that appear in bar 25 but played further up the neck. I chose this position variation because I felt it flowed better and saved any awkward leaps and jumps!

The final bar has a fairly long stretch from the seventh fret on the fifth string followed by the tenth fret on the first and second strings. See you next time for another Giltrap DADGAD composition. ■



RACHEL'S REFLECTION'S - GORDON GILTRAP

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3

TAB 5 0 5 0 5 5

5

TAB 3 0 3 0 2 0 3 0

7

TAB 7 8 0 0 0 0 2 4 0 0

2 10

TAB 3 0 3 0 2 0 3 0

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12-STRING CORNER

Paul Brett arranges the iconic Steely Dan smash hit 'Do It Again' in honour of Elliott Randall

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

Back in the day when everything was new and developing in the world of rock music, the whole world seemed to be plugged into change, both musically and socially. The 60s were great for those around to enjoy the multitude of wonderful things happening for normal folk. Yes the politicians were still creating their brand of mayhem and I lost quite a few mates in the Vietnam War; Americans over here playing music who we then never saw or heard from again. British pop was on top of the world and African American musicians were benefitting from the recognition that groups like the Stones heaped upon them. There were also some amazing American groups – the Beach Boys, Eagles and, one of my all time favourites, Steely Dan. Decades later, I met the legendary guitarist from that band, Elliott Randall, about whom Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page wrote: "Elliott's solo on 'Reelin' In The Years' was the best of all time." Praise indeed coming from one of the UK's guitar legends, and who, coincidentally, I followed as lead guitarist into Neil Christian and the Crusaders in the 60s.

While being one of the great guitar legends, Elliott was and remains his own man, in control of his own destiny. To some, it may seem inconceivable that when offered the role of musical director for the *Blues Brothers* by John Belushi, he turned it down. Was he to know how successful the franchise would become? Probably not, but like many of us who have made such choices, you just move on. Over Elliott's career he has played with many diverse names and within many genres: from the Doobie Brothers and Steely Dan, to James Galway and the American Symphony Orchestra. He was

♩ = 140

INTRO

IN THE

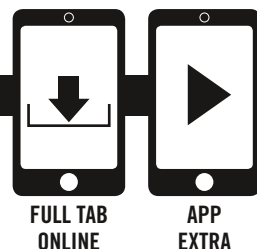
VERSE

MOR - NIN YOU GO RUN - NIN FOR THE MAN WHO STOLE YOUR WA - TER AND YOU

music consultant for the cult American series *Saturday Night Live* and was involved both as a musician and producer of many radio, TV and cinema ads for multi-national companies such as Coca Cola, Ford, McDonalds, MTV, CBS, BBC and many more. Those who refer to such mega talent as journeymen usually pass through the music industry in a very short space of time to obscurity.

Elliott and I met via the JHS/Vintage Company at one of their yearly events and this led me to invite Elliott as our special guest to play and hold a masterclass at the Llyn Acoustic Guitar Festival in October. Along with Gordon Giltrap, John Etheridge, Raymond Burley, brilliant jazz

vocalist Vimala Rowe, Carrie Martin, Rory Evans, vintage guitar man Gavin Coulson and of course, *Tubular Bells* producer and Virgin Records co-founder, Tom Newman. The festival sold out in April and is now in its fourth year. I'm really looking forward to jamming with Elliott after years of being a fan. The piece I am offering in this issue is Steely Dan's iconic first single 'Do it Again'. I have again taken a classic rock song and arranged it for solo 12 string and voice. The guitar is tuned to open minor and is complete within itself, featuring both fingerstyle chordal passages, linked with riffs, and a solo break in the middle. Again, my thanks to Mark Thompson for the tabs. Enjoy! ■



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-- Creative Loafing Magazine, Tampa Bay FL

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COLLECTORS' CORNER

Unlike these days, signature models were something of a rarity in the first half of the 20th century. Paul looks at two Roy Smeck signature instruments that he has in his collection: a Harmony mini jumbo and a Dyer acoustic lap slide

WORDS: PAUL BRETT

Signature models have been around for a long time over the history of guitars. Brands too have become famous and then disappeared, only to be revived again at a later date to carry on their earlier traditions. In the first part of the 20th century, there were not as many guitarists honoured by the addition of their names to guitars or instruments in general as there are these days.

Way back in the good ol' Vaudeville days, a multi-instrumentalist by the name of Roy Smeck was emerging as a popular artist who was definitely going places. As such, he was asked to endorse instruments by various companies who wanted to take advantage of his growing popularity and hopefully sell a few instruments along the way. However, the company he admired the most, C.F. Martin & Co., and whose instruments he used, was not interested in using him as an endorsee. He was only one of two musicians to play the octachordia, which was basically an eight-string lap steel. He was also extremely proficient on guitar, ukulele and banjo, which led him to being signed by Harmony,

Gibson and even the famous harp guitar makers Dyer, to put his name to a variety of models.

He recorded over 500 tracks, even though he wasn't a vocalist, and wrote instruction books on how to play the particular style of music he played on his endorsed instruments. He became popular on American radio with countrywide broadcasts with a variety of different bands and groups, though he always fronted them with his name. The Roy Smeck Trio, The Roy Smeck Quartet and several others including Roy Smeck and his Vita Trio, which was promoting his work on the Harmony branded Vita Uke, which he had an input in designing. There aren't that many Smeck endorsed instruments that have survived the road of time, and those that have are collectable in today's market.

Over the years, I have obtained two such Roy Smeck endorsed instruments. A Harmony mini jumbo, which has a solid spruce top, mahogany back and sides, Brazilian rosewood

fingerboard and bridge with a sunburst finish, and has a big voice with good projection, especially in strum mode. And a Dyer acoustic lap slide with a Lindbergh airplane bridge, added to commemorate Lindbergh's flight from Paris to New York in 1927. It has mahogany back and sides, and an ebony neck and fingerboard, which has a strong and clear tonal voice for blues especially.



Smeck died in 1998 having been active throughout six decades making music, and was inducted into the Ukulele Hall of Fame, earning the title of 'The Wizard of the Strings'. As a collector, these rare signature guitars always fascinate me far more than expensive major brands, and the quality of build and sound is certainly on a par with some of them. It also became apparent to me watching signature genres over the years that not many of the signature players actually play the models they signed up to, at least not for very long anyway. I actually play all of the signature guitars I have put my name to over the years including my earlier Aria models, even though I have a few tempting other brands in my collection!

If you are collecting guitars from the USA and importing them into the UK, it's worth looking into the postal costs and import duties, which have increased quite considerably over the years, as that can add quite a bit to your final budget, especially if you add top value insurance. If you sell via auctions in the UK it also worth checking out the commission charges as they vary greatly between auction houses and VAT is added to this commission.

Houses can charge anywhere from 12.5 per cent up to 25 per cent, and many add on all kinds of incidental costs, like insurance, non selling of goods, internet photos and so on. Best to try and get an all-inclusive deal if you can. You also have to take into account that the buyer will pay on average around 20 per cent plus VAT of the hammer price, and it's always advisable to put a reserve on items unless you want to give them away.

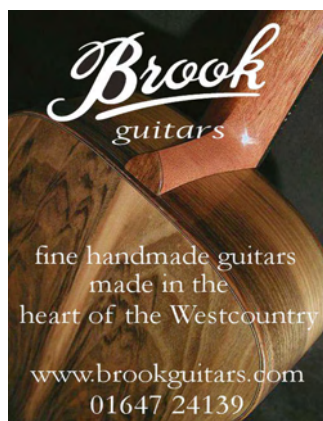
Auctioneers in general do not like reserve prices, and some value items much lower than their actual worth on the premise of a 'come and buy me' strategy. What you have to remember here is that not all auctioneers have a depth of understanding of vintage guitar values across the board and this can backfire on you if you do not set a reserve. Sometimes, they also ask for a 10 per cent or even 20 per cent 'discretion' to sell below the reserve and this can also reduce your final sale fee. Others may argue that you set the reserve too high if items do not sell, but it's your decision to say what the minimum you are prepared to accept for an item is, and their responsibility to both you as the client and to their auction house to use their skills to sell.

Paul Brett



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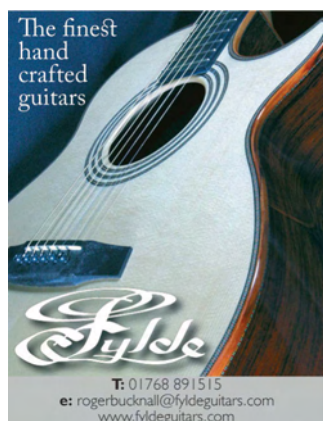
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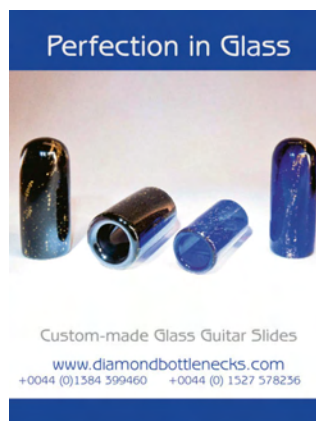
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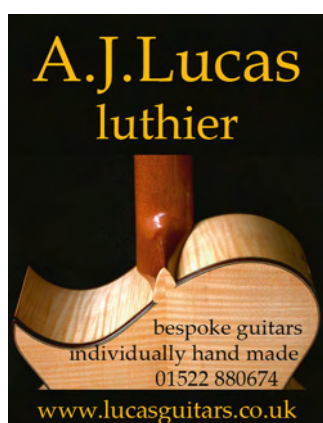


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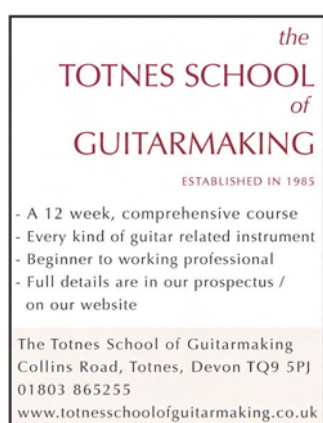
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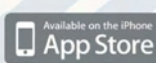
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LEGENDS

LAURA NYRO

WORDS: TERI SACCONI

There was a time in the music industry when one's image didn't matter nearly as much as it does now. You needed to be gifted to have a robust career. Laura Nyro was a singer-songwriter who fit that description. She was beloved by fans and revered among popular musicians and music industry insiders during the 60s and 70s. It was not about the fame, as Nyro was never elevated to commercial superstardom, but always about her songwriting and her voice.

Born Laura Nigro in the Bronx, New York City in 1947, she grew up in a musical household with a father who was a jazz trumpeter. She started playing piano as a very small child, writing her first song at the age of eight. After high school – she attended New York's celebrated High School of the Performing Arts – Laura began performing in small clubs in the city.

In 1967 her debut album, *More Than A New Discovery*, was released. Although it didn't catch fire on the charts, it did attract a sizable fan following and the attention of a slew of recording artists who were drawn to the songs within the grooves. The Fifth Dimension scored huge hits with two songs she had penned, 'Wedding Bell Blues' and 'Blowin' Away'. Barbra Streisand made 'Stoney End' her own and Blood, Sweat & Tears reached number one with the epic 'And When I Die'.

Nyro was a born storyteller and her songs often embodied tales and characters outside of her personal experience. While her star as a songwriter was on the rise, Laura appeared at the landmark 1967 Monterey Pop Festival where she was seen by budding



impresario David Geffen, who quickly signed her with Columbia.

This ushered in her next album *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*. Like her first release this album drew extremely positive critical reviews, although the album didn't catapult her into a household name. The buzz on Nyro was building rapidly, however. *New York Tendaberry*, was released in 1969 and was her biggest commercial venture. Two singles 'Save the Country' and 'Time and Love' both scored big with audiences. Nyro's soulful excavations defied colour, genre and classification, and further galvanised her as a top-notch songwriter of the era.

Nyro was branching out when she released 1970's soulful *Christmas and the Bells of Sweat*, recorded alongside Muscle Shoals session giants like Duane Allman, Roger Hawkins, and Eddie Hinton. Others who appeared on the album include Patti LaBelle and Philly soul megastars Gamble and Huff, who produced one half of the album, while Arif Mardin commandeered the other half. This artistic risk-taking was not done for any commercial gain. It was done simply because Nyro wanted to experiment and grow.

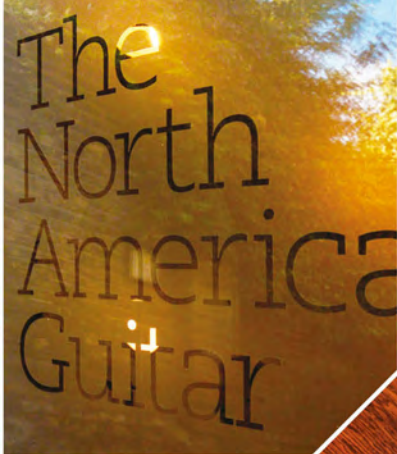
At the age of 24, Laura decided to unexpectedly retire from the music industry. At this point she was newly married, and Nyro left the confines of New York City and moved to a picturesque New England hamlet.

Her exile only lasted a few years as she returned to music in 1976 with *Smile*. The album was lighter, poppier and jazzier than its predecessors and was stacked with top New York and LA session players.

But retirement had arrested the momentum she had previously enjoyed and the album didn't make much of an impact. She toured in support with a full band, resulting in a live document *Season of Lights*. Her next album was 1977's *Nested*, which coincided with the birth of a son. But the album also stayed under the radar. It was right after this that Nyro again retreated from the spotlight, and went through a divorce. But she rose up again in 1984 with *Mother's Spiritual*, which was more introspective and personal than anything else that came before.

Live album *Live at the Bottom Line* captured her at the legendary New York club during an 1989 show, but it wasn't until *Walk the Dog & Light the Light* in 1993 that Nyro released any new material. Sadly, four years later, Nyro would die of ovarian cancer, on April 8, 1997.

Considering some of her powerful and unforgettable songs such as 'Save the Country', 'Eli's Comin'', 'Poverty Train', 'And When I Die', 'Stoney End', 'Sweet Blindness', and 'Stoned Soul Picnic', Laura Nyro was not only a songwriting tour de force, she was also one of the true voices of her generation. ■



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